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ALL ABOUT JESUS.

BY THE

REV. ALEXANDER DICKSON.

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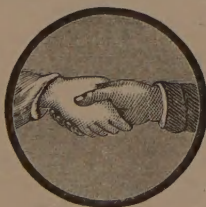
ALL ABOUT JESUS.

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1875

BY

ALEXANDER DICKSON.

"How great is His beauty!" — ZECH. ix. 17.



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TO

My Wife,

WHOM I LOVE

"EVEN AS CHRIST ALSO LOVED THE CHURCH,"¹

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED,

"UNTIL THE DAY BREAK, AND THE SHADOWS FLEE AWAY,"²

WHEN WE SHALL GO BOTH OF US TOGETHER

TO SEE

"The King in His Beauty."³

¹ Eph. v. 25.

² Cant. iv. 6.

³ Isa xxxiii. 17.

*"May the Master make this book as sweet to
others as it has been to me."*

"ROBERT CARTER."

P R E F A C E.

WHEN the order was given for pictures to adorn the walls of the House of Commons, Haydon sent a petition to the British Parliament, praying that he might have the honor of painting one of them : but, if this were denied, that he might paint a figure on the canvas ; if this were not allowed, that he might put on a few touches ; if that could not be granted, that he might mix the colors for the artists ; but, if this were not permitted, that he might hold their brushes.

In our little book, which is all about Jesus, we have not done so much as this last. None but a divine artist could be equal to the task of depicting a divine Person ; and, in one of the best books of the Bible, the Holy Spirit has given us a sketch of the Saviour. And this is the only description which we have of Him, as He appeared in this world ; and Solomon, the wisest of all men, had the distinguished honor of holding the brushes.

For a while we have had no dearer joy, no greater delight, than to dwell upon this divine likeness of our divine Lord. And, while we have not attempted

any thing like a critical examination of its exceeding excellency, we have pointed out the engaging features here delineated, and have endeavored to make their meaning more manifest, that our Beloved may be admired more by those who believe, and that the "daughters of Jerusalem"¹ may be drawn to Him by learning that He is more and better every way than any other beloved.

Many large volumes of acknowledged ability have been written about the wonderful person of our Lord Jesus. The most gifted ministers of the Gospel have given years of patient toil to this great "mystery of godliness;"² and some of their productions are standard works in the science of theology. But the majority of Christians cannot read these learned works with much pleasure or profit, because the language in which they are written is too high for them, and many of the questions discussed are too hard to be understood.

Nor is it necessary that we should have a liberal education and a cultivated mind, in order to apprehend and appreciate that dear Saviour, whom to know aright is life eternal. During the days of His sojourn on the earth, those who understood Him best were the poor and illiterate. Among His friends and followers there were "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble."³ And down to the present day the common people have compre-

¹ Cant. v. 16.

² 1 Tim. iii. 16.

■ 1 Cor. i. 26.

hended Him better than the most distinguished scholars.

Besides, it is not the Great King crowned with many crowns, nor the glory of His kingdom, nor the might of His terrible acts ; it is not the Great Prophet coming from God to instruct us in the things that make for peace ; it is not the Great High Priest offering Himself on the cross for our redemption, and making continual intercession for us in heaven, — no, it is not the Messiah in any or in all of His offices, but it is “the man Christ Jesus ;”¹ it is “Jesus Himself,”² and “Jesus only,”³ who charms us most by the powerful fascination of His personal beauty and His personal love, “Behold, thou art fair, my Beloved, yea, pleasant.”⁴

There is a German legend of a stranger who came in the winter season to a little village, and went up and down among the people, as though she had been one of their neighbors for generations. The aged women saw her as a kind-featured woman, aged like themselves. To the young mothers she was a happy matron ; to the maidens she seemed a light-hearted maiden. Only a little child, holding fast by the skirt of her dress, and looking up into her blessed face, discovered that she was “Mary the mother of Jesus.”⁵

So, it is only when we are converted, and become like little children in faith, and love, and every grace, that we can recognize and understand that Divine

¹ 1 Tim. ii. 5.

² Luke xxiv. 36.

³ Matt. xvii. 8.

⁴ Cant. i. 16.

⁵ Acts i. 14.

man and man Divine, who was the Son of Mary, who was the Son of God. "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes : even so, Father ; for so it seemed good in thy sight." ¹

There will be found, therefore, neither learning nor logic in any of the following chapters ; except what may be called the learning and logic of love. We had neither the ability nor the desire to write "with enticing words of man's wisdom." ² From the first page to the last our little book has been a "labor of love." ³ It was written only from the heart, and only for the heart ; and we are pleased to think that there are many to whom it may be more useful for this very reason.

It was not Mr. Great-Head, but Mr. Great-Heart, who guided and guarded Christiana and her children through the perils of their pilgrimage to the celestial city. And if only one widow indeed shall be comforted, or one little child shall be converted, by reading our simple meditations, the author and his work will be blessed above all their deservings, and not unto us, — not unto us, — but unto Him who is all our theme, shall be all the praise.

LANSINGBURGH, N. Y., Christmas-day, 1874.

¹ Luke x. 21.

² 1 Cor. ii. 4.

³ Heb. vi. 10.

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MY BELOVED
IS WHITE AND RUDDY,
THE CHIEFEST AMONG TEN THOUSAND.
HIS HEAD IS AS THE MOST FINE GOLD,
HIS LOCKS ARE BUSHY, AND BLACK AS A RAVEN.
HIS EYES ARE AS THE EYES OF DOVES
BY THE RIVERS OF WATERS,
WASHED WITH MILK, AND FITLY SET.
HIS CHEEKS ARE AS A BED OF SPICES, AS SWEET FLOWERS:
HIS LIPS LIKE LILIES,
DROPPING SWEET-SMELLING MYRRH.
HIS HANDS ARE AS GOLD RINGS SET WITH THE BERYL:
HIS BELLY IS AS BRIGHT IVORY
OVERLAID WITH SAPPHIRES.
HIS LEGS ARE AS PILLARS OF MARBLE,
SET UPON SOCKETS OF FINE GOLD:
HIS COUNTENANCE IS AS LEBANON,
EXCELLENT AS THE CEDARS.
HIS MOUTH IS MOST SWEET:
YEA, HE IS ALTOGETHER LOVELY.
THIS IS MY BELOVED, AND THIS IS MY FRIEND,
O DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM.

Cant. v. 10-16.

MY BELOVED.

ALL ABOUT JESUS.

CHAPTER I.

"My Beloved."

"MY heart is inditing a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching"¹ the beauty of my beloved Jesus. Would that I had an angel's tongue and an archangel's eloquence, that I might speak of this sweet and precious theme in such a way that all its loveliness might be expressed for those who love the Saviour, and especially for the daughters of Jerusalem, who may be saying, "What is thy beloved more than another beloved?"²

But, although I may not have the gift of an angel's tongue nor the grace of an archangel's eloquence, in my personal experience of redeeming love I have something better than both, and trust that I may be able, in some measure, to make my Jesus known to others as He is revealed in me. And that this may be so, dearest Saviour, may thy grace be poured into my lips, and thy light into my mind; and "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer."³

¹ Ps. xlv. 1.

² Cant. v. 9.

³ Ps. xix. 14.

No mention of the name of Jesus is made in the inspired description of His person, which we have taken as a frame-work around which our thoughts shall entwine themselves. But no mention of His name is needed, for in love's own well-chosen words of fondest endearment He is here spoken of without controversy ; and many will rightly understand this sweet language of the heart, beating responsive to the pure and loving heart of Jesus.

"Beloved" is one of the many tender and expressive titles of our heavenly suitor. The best words in human language, and the most beautiful objects in nature, are often taken by the sacred writers, and by Himself also, if by any means they might make known what Jesus is to those who love Him. He is "the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys ;" "the bright and morning star ;" "the true vine," and the sweet "apple-tree ;" "the good shepherd," and man's best "brother."

But all the other titles which are divinely given to the Saviour, of a set purpose to show His worth, would not make one beloved. This is the sweetest, best, and most beautifully touching of the more than two hundred epithets of Jesus. It is the "alabaster box" which contains the most precious spikenard ; and as we proceed to break it now, and let the odor out, if you are a lover of the Saviour, you will be delighted with the sweet perfume of His dearest name, which is "as ointment poured forth."¹

"Beloved" is a word which belongs peculiarly to

¹ Cant. i. 3.

love's own language, and comes rather from the heart than from the head, and can only be properly used in their communion and fellowship by those who have fallen in love with each other. Neither strangers nor neighbors, nor mere friends, should ever think of using it when writing or speaking to or of one another; but those who have joined their hearts, and hope some day to join their hands, may use it without gainsaying. Indeed, they cannot help using it, because "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."¹

"My beloved."² The little personal pronoun was never before so big with blessed meaning; and I may speak, nay, I must speak, of Jesus in this language of appropriating affection, because my beloved belongs to me, and all that belongs to Him belongs to me. He is my personal Saviour and my personal property. As the King of Israel once said to the King of Syria, so my Saviour says to me, "I am thine, and all that I have."³ In the covenant of grace He gave Himself to me, as well as for me; and not only Himself alone, but every thing that belongs to Him. And as He is Lord of all, all things are mine. "The world," and "life," and "death," and "things present," and "things to come,"⁴ all are mine, because Jesus is mine. The "unspeakable gift"⁵ not only exceeds, but it also embraces, every other blessing. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"⁶

¹ Matt. xii. 34.² Cant. v. 10.³ 1 Kings xx. 4.⁴ 1 Cor. iii. 22.⁵ 2 Cor. ix. 15.⁶ Rom. viii. 32.

My Jesus is my best beloved. "A bundle of myrrh is my well-beloved unto me,"¹ "a cluster of camphire,"² a "hill of frankincense,"³ and "mountains of spices."⁴ He is my brightest jewel, my choicest treasure, and my most beautiful ornament, my "pearl of great price."⁵ He is better worth than all the world to me. Nay, more, He is better worth to me than all the world to come. My Jesus, my Jesus! "whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee."⁶ When weighed in the balance against thee, things present and things to come are lighter than vanity and less than nothing.

And though "I am less than the least of all saints," and "not worthy to stoop down and unloose"⁷ the latchet of my Saviour's shoes, nor to kiss the holy ground on which He walks, yet I do believe that I am better worth than all the world to Him. "The Lord's portion is His people."⁸ They are "His delight," "His workmanship," the dear-bought purchase of His blood, the desire of His heart, and "the apple of His eye." The "earthly house of this tabernacle" is His temple, and my soul is His most holy place, — the very "heaven of heavens," where He lives and reigns with the golden sceptre of His gracious love.

In the consecration of Himself to me, Jesus kept nothing back. His crown and throne and sceptre, His body, soul, and spirit, were all given to me, and

¹ Cant. i. 13.

² Cant. i. 14.

³ Cant. iv. 6.

⁴ Cant. viii. 14.

⁵ Matt. xiii. 46.

⁶ Ps. lxxiii. 23.

⁷ Mark i. 7.

⁸ Deut. xxxii. 9.

they are all my own, my very own. They are my present personal possession, and I have a better right and title to them than Abraham had to the land of Canaan ; and I set more store by them than any miser by his money. Indeed, the money was never minted worthy to be compared with "the unsearchable riches of Christ,"¹ and "the exceeding riches of His grace."²

Oh, yes ! my dear, sweet Jesus is mine. He is all mine. With all His gifts and graces, with all His attributes and perfections, Jesus is mine. His head is mine, to rule over me and keep me in subjection to Himself ; His heart is mine, to love me with more than a mother's tenderness ; His eyes are mine, to watch over me in all my ways ; His feet are mine, to run after me when I am going astray ; and His hands are mine, to lift me to His shoulder rejoicing, and bring me to His fold again. His mercy is mine, to pardon all my sins ; His blood is mine, to wash me pure from their pollution ; His righteousness is mine, to clothe me with His own clean linen, the best earthly as well as the only heavenly dress ; His grace is mine, to sustain me all my journey through ; and His glory is mine, to reward me evermore. "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory."³

And if "my beloved is mine,"⁴ then "I am His," according to the logic of love. The high contracting party of the first part is "the King of glory:"⁵ the party of the second part is I myself, once a rebel

¹ Eph. iii. 8.

² Eph. ii. 7.

³ Ps. lxxiii. 24.

⁴ Cant. ii. 16.

⁵ Ps. xxiv. 9.

against His grace. In His condescending love He came down from heaven, and taking my hand in His He said unto me, "I will betroth thee unto me for ever ; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness ; and thou shalt know the Lord."¹ And to this divine solicitation He gave me grace to respond heartily, saying, "Amen : even so, Lord Jesus. I am thine for ever." And so our engagement was consummated, and the bond of our union is the most blessed, as well as the most binding, for we are betrothed to each other. He has been pleased to love me, and because He loved me He espoused me to Himself. Oh blessed betrothal ! how good it is ! how strong it is ! "In loving-kindness and for ever !" There is not power enough in earth and hell to put us asunder. We are one, one already, — one in heart. "I am my beloved's"² as truly now as if the marriage day had dawned, and I had gone up out of the wilderness to the marriage mansion and the marriage supper, leaning on His arm, to be ever with Him, as the bride is with the bridegroom, where there is "fulness of joy" and "pleasures for evermore."³

There was a time when I could not call my beloved mine, nor did I care to call Him mine. To my natural eyes there was no attraction in Him. I could not see the beauty of His holiness nor the beauty of His loveliness, "because they are spiritually discerned."⁴ He

■ Hos. ii. 19.

■ Ps. xvi. 11

² Cant. vi. 3.

⁴ 1 Cor. ii. 14.

appeared to me rather like "a root out of a dry ground,"¹ without form or comeliness. But when He opened my born-blind eyes to see Him as my Saviour, when He revealed Himself in me, when He was born again in my mind, when He was transfigured in my heart, then I saw how beautiful and lovely and amiable He was ; and, bestowing my best love upon Him immediately, I wondered at my former blindness.

I wondered more, much more, that one so lovely should love one like me. Me an alien, me an enemy, me an outcast ; for the wonder is not that He loves me so dearly and so deeply as He does, but that He loves me at all. In the world's surprising story there is nothing like the love of Jesus. It stands solitary and alone, without a parallel and without a precedent.

When the king or the crown prince is seeking for a wife, the head has more to do with the matter than the heart, and he is guided generally by state considerations. The lot falls upon some foreign princess, because her house has rendered aid to his government in the time of need ; or she is chosen to please some political party, or to promote some powerful alliance, and so to secure, if possible, the permanence and the prosperity of the dominion.

But some of the nobler kind of kings, disdaining all such considerations, and disregarding the laws and customs of the realm, have sometimes descended from the throne and taken a bride from some country cottage, and the untitled and unknown have been raised to the second place in the kingdom. Still in such

¹ Isa. liii. 2.

cases there was some good reason for the conduct of the crown. The royal heart was captivated by surpassing beauty or by personal charms, like Esther's, and "the elect lady"¹ was loved because she was so lovely.

But the King of kings was influenced by no such motives when He loved us. We were far from being beautiful, and there was no charm about our character. Our house had rendered no service to His government which He desired openly to reward. But, contrariwise, we were without comeliness every way. Our character was as black as sin could make it; and, sorer still, we had broken out into open rebellion against His rightful authority, and were trampling under foot the blood of the covenant. And yet, notwithstanding all this, He loved us. Deserving only His wrath and curse, Jesus loves us now. He loves us more than He loves the fallen angels, who have seen better days. "For verily He took not on Him the nature of angels."² He loves us more than He loves the holy angels round the throne in heaven. "To which of the angels said He at any time, Sit on my right hand?"³ And He is not willing that we should perish. How strange! how passing strange! And yet how true is our dear Redeemer's love! For "this is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief."⁴

It is a reasonable service, therefore, that we should

¹ 2 John 1.

³ Heb. i. 13.

² Heb. ii. 16.

⁴ 1 Tim. i. 15.

love this loving Saviour in return, because love is the only proper compensation for love. "If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned."¹ And, if we love Jesus as He deserves to be loved, the heart will constrain the hand to give Him all that we possess. To say that we love Jesus, and then to keep "back part of the price"² of our possessions, is a very dreadful thing. And sometimes, when looking at the scanty offerings that are laid at His feet by His professing people, I can hardly restrain myself from saying, with something of its original sharpness, "Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much?"³

And just as Jesus, with all that He has, belongs to us, so we ourselves, and all that we have, belong to Him. We are not our own in any sense. We belong to Christ by reason of our two creations. We were born for Him, and we were born again for Him. Besides, we were bought by Him. The kind kinsman redeemer first "purchased"⁴ Ruth the stranger herself, then he claimed the field and the inheritance. So Christ claims all our possessions: and, if only we could love Him as He loves us, His claims would never be disputed; but all our title-papers would be laid a free-will offering on His altar, and with our money He might be pleased to make wings for His angels, "having the everlasting gospel to preach"⁵ to all nations. But, if we withhold our riches from Him, they may "make themselves wings"⁶ and fly away as

¹ Cant. viii. 7.² Acts v. 2.³ Acts v. 8.⁴ Ruth iv. 10.⁵ Rev. xiv. 6.⁶ Prov. xxiii. 5.

an eagle toward heaven. "There is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty." ¹

Come then, O my soul, and let me consecrate myself anew to my beloved Jesus. Here at thy feet, dear Lord, I fall. Accept the "free-will offering," the "whole burnt offering," the "living sacrifice;" for I am thine, and all that I have. I am thine, as thou art mine. I am thine, because thou art mine. I have chosen thee, because thou hast chosen me. "We love Him, because He first loved us." ² And not my soul merely, but my body is thine, — all my members. My head to think for thee, my hands to work for thee, my feet to run after thee, and my heart to love thee supremely. My time also is thine, and my talents, — all that I am and all that I have. I would be thine only, and thine entirely, and thine for ever.

Like the little child with the stalk of grapes, who picked one grape after another from the cluster and held it out to her father, till, as affection waxed warm, and self faded, she gladly flung the whole bunch into his bosom, and then followed it herself, smiling in his face with triumphant delight; so let me do, and not me only, but every lover of the Lord Jesus; and so let us continue to do, until, loosening from every earthly comfort, and independent of the help of broken cisterns, we can say in language borrowed from our beloved, "All mine are thine, and thine are mine." ³

And although there are times of doubt and darkness and despondency, when my love is cold, and my faith is small, and my hope is dim, I will not despair,

¹ Prov. xi. 24.

² 1 John iv. 19.

³ John xvii. 10.

because though I cannot always say, "My beloved is mine,"¹ I may say, "I am His." If I may not always have the faith of full assurance, I must always have the faith of fast adherence. If I may not apply my beloved to myself, I must apply myself to my beloved. Driven from one horn of the altar, I will lay hold of the other. King David could not always say to the Lord, "Thou art my Lord;"² but he could always say the next thing to it, "I am thine, save me."³ And if only I may be able to say, "I am my beloved's,"⁴ this dawning of the day of grace will soon brighten enough for me to say, "My beloved is mine."⁵

In the days of ancient Rome, the Campanians were a feeble folk, a little nation by themselves, and their army was exceeding small. The proud and powerful Grecians coveted their "parcel of ground," as Ahab coveted Naboth's vineyard, and came and made war against them, and their subjugation seemed only a question of time. So, in their great distress, this small nation sent messengers to the Roman Senate, asking assistance; but the request was refused, because Greece and Rome were on friendly terms at the time. But being hard pressed and sore vexed, and reduced to the last extremity, they sent again to the Roman Senate, imploring their pity, and begging that a legion of soldiers might be ordered to their deliverance; but this second request fared no better than the first. At last, seeing that their destruction was near and inevitable, they nobly resolved to give them-

¹ Cant. ii. 16.² Ps. xvi. 2.³ Ps. cxix. 94.⁴ Cant. vi. 3.⁵ Cant. vi. 3.

selves and their country to the Senate ; and, just as soon as their territory was annexed to the empire, that small nation nestled safely under the far-spreading and protecting wings of the imperial eagles. As neighbors the Romans would not go to their relief, but as fellow-citizens they could not refuse to come and help them.

So, perishing as I am, and unable in my own strength and resources to withstand the terrible assaults of the great adversary, I will give myself to one who is mighty to save. Jesus, Master, — my Master, my great Master, — come and take me, here and now, and make me all thine own. I would be thine. I must be thine. If I may not be thy happy spouse, I will be thy happy slave. “Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings.”¹ If I may not be brought to thee, “in raiment of needlework,”² to become thy “queen in gold of Ophir,”³ I will count myself happy to be thy bond-servant for ever ; and to wash thy feet with my tears shall be daily my delight, for thou art “my beloved.”

Already, in the very beginning of our communion with Christ, and during the early spring season of our mutual love, “The mandrakes give a smell, and at our gates are all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old, which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved.”⁴

¹ Ps. xvii. 8.

■ Ps. xlv. 9.

² Ps. xlv. 14.

⁴ Cant. vii. 13.

HIS COMPLEXION.

CHAPTER II.

"My Beloved is white and ruddy."

THIS is the beginning of love's own answer to the question of the daughters of Jerusalem. It is the first glimpse we get of the personal appearance of our blessed Redeemer. And as there are two colors blending together in His happy composition, they may refer primarily to the two natures of Jesus, because He was, and is, and is to be, both "God and man, in two distinct natures and one person for ever."

The whiteness, by reason of its simplicity, is one of the best emblems of the Divinity of Christ. Speaking properly, white is not one of the seven colors, but it is that appearance which comes from the commingling of them all, like the pure white light of heaven; and for this reason it is most becoming to Him who clothes Himself "with light as with a garment,"¹ and who dwelleth in light which is inaccessible and full of glory.

The redness with which the whiteness is delicately tinted is the oldest and most expressive emblem of that humanity which Jesus took and joined to His divinity. The very name of the first man, Adam, comes from a root which means "to be red," and is

¹ Ps. civ. 2.

closely related to the word which is translated blood, which gives to the countenance, in most countries, its fleshly appearance. "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same."¹

And there was a necessity that Jesus, who was with God, and who was God, should become man, and dwell with men. It was His desire and His determination to reveal God unto us more fully and in a better way than He had been revealed ever before. The sign manual of their Maker was left on all the works of creation. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth His handy work. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge."² The sun and moon and stars have neither tongue nor speech nor language, yet their voice is plainly heard proclaiming the power, the presence, and the praise of God. And the most degraded heathen in their blindness are not so blind that they cannot see and learn enough natural theology to render them responsible. "For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse."³

But, whilst there were many unmistakable signs of an Almighty and All-wise Creator, there was no Christ in creation, there was no cross in creation. So far as redemption was concerned, this oracle was dumb, and the light of the sun was darkness.

¹ Heb. ii. 14.

² Ps. xix. 1.

³ Rom. i. 20.

There can be no question now, that the second person in the ever-blessed and adorable Trinity appeared occasionally to the patriarchs and other worthies, in our own likeness, trying on, as it would seem, the humanity which He afterwards took never to lay aside, anticipating "the fulness of time" when He would become incarnate.

And in the tabernacle, and also in the temple under the former dispensation, there was what the Scriptures called "the glory,"¹ which was the bright shining of Jehovah's presence that dwelt between the cherubim. It was the visible manifestation of the invisible One. Like lightning splendors, this ever-living fire flamed and flashed through the embroidered veil, to remind the worshippers that there was One in the most holy place who could see them, though they could not see Him, and who was pleased to manifest Himself unto them in this peculiar way.

But the Almighty Father, with whom we have to do, was pleased for His own glory to come still nearer to us, and to make a clearer and completer manifestation of Himself to us in the face of Jesus Christ His Son; and so "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us."² The Son of God became the Son of man. He who was in the form of God, and reckoned it no robbery to be equal with God, "made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men."³

And in doing so He has revealed God unto us as

¹ Rom. ix. 4.

² John i. 14.

³ Phil. ii. 7.

much as He can be revealed. No man could look on God's face and live for another moment. The overwhelming glory would overpower us, and we would die beneath its blazing brightness, "for our God is a consuming fire."¹ But these red and burning rays, beaming from the face of the eternal Father, are softened down and shaded in shining through the human nature, and reflected from the face of the eternal Son. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him."²

And therefore, when we see Jesus, we see Jehovah in Jesus. Jehovah Jesus! He is our God. He is our own God. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."³ "I and my Father are one."⁴ The grace and glory of God, the mercy and the truth of God, the nature and the name of God, are all manifested unto us in Jesus. "Neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him."⁵

In the calm and clear summer evenings after the sun was set, walking by the brink of the river, we have often seen the star-spangled sky, with its silvery moon marching in splendor, and the flitting, feathery clouds, all reflected in the quiet water. And the starry heavens actually seem nearer and brighter and more beautiful when looking down at them in the water than when looking up at them in the azure vault.

¹ Heb. xii. 29.

² John i. 18.

³ John xiv. 9.

⁴ John x. 30.

⁵ Matt. xi. 27.

On the ceiling of a palace in the city of Rome there is a celebrated painting of the Aurora. The goddess of the morning is represented as rising out of the sea in a golden chariot drawn by shining horses ; like liquid pearls, the gentle dew is dropping from her rosy fingers ; and the darkness of the night is disappearing before her smiling face.

But the effect intended to be produced by this remarkable work of art was not fully realized, because it was so far from the spectators, who soon became weary and dizzy by looking up at it, and were obliged to retire in disappointment, greatly regretting that it could not be seen more perfectly.

Perceiving that it was quite impossible to get a good view of the representation in its lofty height, and desiring to remove the difficulty, the proprietor procured a large looking-glass and laid it on the floor, in the middle of the frescoed room, and raised a railing round it.

Then — if the reader will pardon some few technical incongruities in such comparisons — by looking at the mirror, in which the picture was brought down from the ceiling, it could be seen with much more satisfaction. And it was so pleasant to the eye and so engaging to the mind, that the longer it was examined in the glass, the more it was appreciated and admired.

So, in looking up at God, as He is partly made manifest in heaven above, we are bewildered and perplexed. “The high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity”¹ is too far removed from mortal sight, and

¹ Isa. lvii. 15.

we can see Him but dimly in the distance. We can see enough of His perfections to know that He is great and good and wise ; but yet, after all, such views of Him, though better than nothing, are very imperfect, indistinct, and unsatisfactory. We could just discern enough to make us long for a nearer and a clearer view of Him, whom to know aright is life eternal. "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks,"¹ so our souls were panting after God ; but such knowledge was too wonderful for us, — it was high, and we could not attain unto it. "Canst thou by searching find out God ? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection ?" ■

And just here, in our guilty inability to acquaint ourselves with God as "our own God"³ and our "exceeding joy,"⁴ Jesus brings Him down to us in the likeness of our "sinful flesh."⁵ In Himself, "who is the image of the invisible God,"⁶ as in a glass, Jesus has shown us the Father, — His Father and our Father, His God and our God. "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world."⁷

These two distinct natures, in the single person of our dear Saviour, were each distinctly apparent when He dwelt among us and went about doing good. Embarking one evening upon the Lake of Galilee, He said to His disciples, "Let us go over unto the other side."⁸ He had been about his Father's business all day long ;

¹ Ps. xlii. 1.

■ Ps. xliii. 4.

⁷ John xvii. 6.

■ Job xi. 7.

⁵ Rom. viii. 3.

■ Luke viii. 22.

³ Ps. lxvii. 6.

⁶ Col. i. 15.

and, quite exhausted with its "labors more abundant,"¹ He entered into a ship, and going down at once into the hinder part thereof, and placing His head upon a pillow, He fell asleep. And He slept as sweetly and as soundly there that night as any laboring man ever sleeps at home after a long hard day's work in the harvest field.

But in a little while there came a storm. The black clouds blotted out the bright stars from the sky, and there fell upon the lake a darkness so thick that it might be felt. The wind blew a boisterous gale. The waves dashed over and into the ship. And the tempest must have been one of unusual severity, for the Saviour's friends, some of whom were old fishermen, were sore afraid; and in downright despair they waked Him, saying, "Master, carest thou not that we perish?"² And rising up quickly, and walking the slippery deck of the reeling vessel, "He rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm."

In the sleeping we have one of the best illustrations of the human nature of Christ, who was "in all points tempted like as we are."³ He felt all our sinless infirmities, and often needed sleep as much as we ever do. But, in stilling the tempest, we have one of the best illustrations of His divine nature. None but He who created the elements can command them. No mere man can control the rushing waters and the raging winds: but Jesus did, and the disciples were

¹ 2 Cor. xi. 23.

² Mark iv. 38.

³ Heb. iv. 15.

quick enough to perceive that their Master must needs be more than man: "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him!"¹

So likewise, a poor wayfaring man, the Saviour sat in weariness at Jacob's well, to rest awhile. He had travelled on foot many miles since morning, and it was noon now. The dust of His long journey had settled on His sandals. He was more than weary, He was hungry; and the disciples had gone into the neighboring "city of Sychar, to buy meat."² He was also thirsty; and the well was deep, and He had nothing to draw with. "Jesus therefore, being wearied with His journey, sat thus on the well."³ And, while he was sitting there, the strange woman of Samaria came after a pitcher of water. Jesus asked her for a drink, and whether she gave it to Him or not is not certain; but straightway He turned the conversation into a religious channel, and drew water with joy for her "out of the wells of salvation."⁴ It was the man Christ Jesus, who rested at the well. And it was the mighty God, "greater than our father Jacob,"⁵ who gave the living water to the thirsty soul of a great sinner.

And, again, at the grave of Lazarus "Jesus wept."⁶ He wept tears of sorrow for Himself, because His friend was buried there; and tears of sincerest sympathy for Mary and her sister Martha, whose only brother had melted from their embrace, and left their home so desolate; but before those tears were dry upon His "white and ruddy" countenance He issued

¹ Matt. viii. 27.

² John iv. 8.

³ John iv. 6.

⁴ Isa. xii. 3.

⁵ John iv. 12.

⁶ John xi. 35.

the divine behest: "Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth."¹

It was the tender-hearted "man of sorrows" who came to weep with them that weep, whose tears ran down like rain, and perhaps like "rivers of water,"² as He groaned in spirit at the grave of His departed friend, and the only support of two lonely sisters. But it was "the resurrection, and the life,"³ the one who hath "the keys of hell and of death,"⁴ who commanded the corruptible to put on incorruption, and the mortal to put on immortality, so fulfilling in Himself the ancient prediction: "O death, I will be thy plagues, O grave, I will be thy destruction."⁵

But the whiteness and the ruddiness which appear blending together in our Beloved may refer to His character and work. White is the emblem of purity. Even by the pagan nations it was regarded as the token of the highest moral worth; for among the ancient Romans those men who were nominated for office were clothed in white robes of a set purpose, to signify that they were spotless like their garments; and for this reason they were called candidates, which, being interpreted, means men in white robes. Also in the early Church, when converts from heathenism were presented to receive the sacrament of holy baptism, the officiating minister gave to each one a white robe, saying, "See that thou bring it spotless to the judgment-seat of Christ," showing what a holy life the Christian should lead.

Moreover, white is the uniform of the redeemed

¹ John xi. 43.

² Lam. iii. 48.

³ John xi. 25.

⁴ Rev. i. 18.

⁵ Hos. xiii. 14.

in glory. You remember that interesting dialogue in one of the beloved disciple's visions of heaven unveiled: "What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."¹ The very garments that the glorified wear in heaven shall proclaim the praise of Him who made them what they are. But no saint in earth or in heaven was ever half so pure and holy as the Saviour. He was always pure and holy. His raiment never needed washing. From the beginning to the end of His busy life upon earth, He was beauteous and blameless. He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners."² He never uttered one idle word, never entertained one sinful thought, never did one unkind act. His body, soul, and spirit were all perfectly holy, and He could truly say, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me."³

In His immaculate person, both His natures were equally holy; and when the tempter came with the subtlety of the old serpent, his wicked suggestions and fiery darts found neither avarice nor ambition, nor any such thing, on which to kindle; and of course he met with no success at all. Even Pilate, His unjust judge, found no fault in Him, and wanted to acquit Him, and tried hard to wash his guilty hands clean from the stain of their greatest crime, saying to the multitude, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person."⁴

¹ Rev. vii. 13.

³ John xiv. 30.

² Heb. vii. 26.

⁴ Matt. xxvii. 24.

And Herod, who mocked Him, was of the same opinion as Pilate. And even Judas, "the son of perdition," who sold Him to the chief priests, declared that he had betrayed "the innocent blood;"¹ so that, His enemies being judges, the moral character of Christ was very wonderful. Very wonderful did I say? Had He been only a mere man, it would have been very wonderful; but as He was more than man, as He was God as well as man, the wonder vanishes away, because God could be nothing else but holy, harmless, and undefiled.

And from the spotless character of Christ, considered as a man merely, and looking only at His human side, one of the strongest arguments, and most convincing, has been made to prove His divinity. Just as the skilful mathematician will draw an object, having only the shadow to guide him, so from the shadow of the Saviour's perfect human nature His divine nature has been — what shall I say? — described? no — defined? no — but projected and proved, because such a perfect man must have been more than man. He must have been the mighty God Himself.

And the ruddiness has reference, perhaps, to the Saviour's work as our Redeemer. We were sold under sin, and we sold ourselves. We sold ourselves cheap; we sold ourselves for less than "one morsel of meat."² We sold ourselves "for nought."³ But we could not buy ourselves back for all that we possessed. "What shall a man give in exchange for

- ¹ Matt. xxvii. 4.

² Heb. xii. 16.

³ Isa. lii. 3.

his soul?"¹ "Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"² Nay, the price of our redemption was so high that it was beyond the reach of even the Saviour's sinless humanity. "Without shedding of blood is no remission."³ And this blood for blotting out transgression must be more than human; and it was more and better every way. The blood of Jesus was the blood of God, as the Holy Ghost testifies in these words, "the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood."⁴

For thousands of years its shedding was foreshadowed in many ways. In the early world, Abel's offering was accepted because it pointed to the "Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."⁵ And day by day, as the blood of beasts flowed from altars all over the earth, it proclaimed the coming of the great sacrifice. And when the long-looked-for Lamb came at last, the hour of His dreadful death was ever before Him. As He went about feeding the hungry, healing the sick, and raising the dead, He was treading "the wine-press alone." He was always anticipating the baptism of blood: "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!"⁶

And as we behold Him in the anguish of His soul and body, sweating "great drops of blood falling down to the ground"⁷ in Gethsemane, and bleeding from

¹ Matt. xvi. 26.

² Mic. vi. 7.

³ Heb. ix. 22.

⁴ Acts xx. 28.

⁵ John i. 29.

⁶ Luke xii. 50.

⁷ Luke xxii. 44.

His hands and feet and side when hanging on the cross, well may we exclaim : “ Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah ? this that is glorious in His apparel, travelling in the greatness of His strength ? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Wherefore art Thou red in Thine apparel, and Thy garments like Him that treadeth in the wine-fat ? I have trodden the wine-press alone ; and of the people there was none with me.” ¹

And as He suffered and died, so He rose again and ascended up on high, wearing all the marks of His passion ; and so He will remain for ever, presenting to the redeemed in glory the signs of His sufferings for them, and by these signs of suffering we shall recognize Him in heaven. One dark night, after a dreadful battle in one of the greatest kingdoms of this world, the queen left her royal palace, accompanied by a few attendants, and went to the bloody field to look after her dear dead husband, who had fallen bravely fighting for her crown and his own. With a flaming torch in her hand, she walked along the line of death, and lighted up the pale, blood-stained faces of the slain, looking earnestly for the marks of wounds he had received in former engagements, by which she hoped to identify him. At last, when she came to a certain place that looked as if it had been the head-quarters of the army, gazing intently into this face and that, suddenly the torch dropped from her palsied fingers, and she fell prostrate on the form of her beloved, exclaiming with strong crying and tears : “ I have found

¹ Isa. lxiii. i.

him, I have found him ! I know him by his scars, I know him by his scars !”

In the same manner we shall know our Saviour by the five bleeding wounds He received for us on Calvary. So, Thomas knew Him after the resurrection, and refused to be convinced except by the print of the nails and the spear. “Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands ; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side ; and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto Him, My Lord and my God.”¹ So John knew Jesus among the ransomed throng in heaven : “I beheld, and lo, in the midst of the throne, and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain.”²

But, as the person of “My Beloved” is the great attraction, perhaps the white and the red mingling together may refer mainly to His complexion. It is pleasant to think of Him as God and man. It is also pleasant to think of His spotless character and His sacrificial death. But, after all, it is the beautiful person of the dear Lord Jesus that is the loadstone that draws my loving heart to Him. And, “looking unto Jesus,”³ I delight to see His delicate complexion, His fascinating beauty. He is white as “the lily of the valleys” and red as “the rose of Sharon.”

Of the child Moses it is said he “was exceeding fair ;”⁴ but the “holy child Jesus,”⁵ as the apostles loved to call Him, must have been far more exceeding

¹ John xx. 27.

² Rev. v. 6.

■ Heb. xii. 2.

■ Acts vii. 20.

⁵ Acts iv. 27.

fair, "fairer than the children of men."¹ And of David it is written, "He was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to."² But He who describes Himself as "the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star,"³ is of a fairer countenance and far more beautiful in our eyes. The best artists of every age have given us their finest conceptions of Him upon the canvas ; but in all the world there was never but one face of Jesus that could be looked at with any pleasure, and this one falls far, far below the beauty of the great original. It is not possible to depict the face of Jesus, it is scarcely proper to make the vain attempt.

"All human beauties, all divine,
In my Beloved meet and shine."

Dearest Saviour, the morning sunrise and the evening sunset, the moon and stars which thou hast ordained, the early dew and the beautiful snow, are not so beautiful as thou art. The fragrant flowers, the shining seas and the majestic mountains, are not worthy to be compared with thee. Every thing that thou hast made must needs blush before thine own uncreated beauty. Thou art fairer than the flowers of the field ; thou art fairer than the children of men ; thou art fairer than the angels in heaven. Thou art the brightness of the Father's glory, the express image of His person, and the very perfection of beauty. Let it please thee, for thy name's sake, to make us as good and as glorious as thou art. Let the same mind

¹ Ps. xlv. 2.

■ ■ Sam. xvi. 12.

³ Rev. xxii. 16.

be in us which is also in thee. Cover us with the same majesty with which thou art covered ; and may the same halo of heavenly light and love that gathered round thy head divine, shine out from our eyes that we may look like thee. By the presence and the power of thy Holy Spirit take away all our badness and all our blackness, and make us as blameless and as beauteous as thou art. Purge us with hyssop and we shall be clean, wash us and we shall be whiter than snow. Wash us thoroughly in the fountain of thy blood, and make us so pure and holy that even snow would stain us and dew defile us. Remember these words unto thy servants in which thou hast caused us to hope, "We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." ¹ Seven times a day will we praise thee for thy "glorious beauty." ² We will praise thee while we have any being ; and when we have no being here our dead dust shall praise thee, till it shall hear thy voice and come forth clothed with thine own celestial comeliness. "For our conversation is in heaven ; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ : who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself." ³

¹ 2 Cor. iii. 18.² Isa. xxviii. 4.³ Phil. iii. 20, 21.

HIS PRE-EMINENCE.

CHAPTER III.

■ *The chiefest among ten thousand.*"

IT should not be forgotten that we have taken upon ourselves to answer the question, "What is thy Beloved more than another beloved?"¹ And it is greatly to be feared that our answer will not be satisfactory to the "daughters of Jerusalem,"² nor to "the bride, the Lamb's wife,"³ because neither speech nor language can express the Saviour's superior worth.

Our Beloved is "more than another beloved." He is more than all other beloveds. This we can say most truly; but how much more He is in His exceeding excellency, of course we cannot tell. If the imagination of the poet, and the pencil of the artist, and the pen of the inspired historian have all failed to depict His immaculate purity and resplendent beauty, it must not be counted a strange thing if we shall not be able to show how much better He is than all beside.

Often in His Old Testament, and sometimes by Himself, His beloved people are likened to a bannered army: "Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?"⁴ And while we are

¹ Cant. v. 9.

² Cant. v. 16.

³ Rev. xxi. 9.

■ Cant. vi. 10.

marching and countermarching and fighting, Jesus is with us as our "standard-bearer;"¹ and in camp and on the high places of the field, even as at His holy table, His banner over us is love.

In every thoroughly furnished army, the soldier who carries the colors is, in a certain proper sense, the chiefest among them all. His position is at the same time the most prominent, the most honorable, and the most dangerous. The flag is such a good mark for the enemy; and if only they can capture the ensign they are greatly delighted, as it is counted better worth than many prisoners of war. Not unfrequently, in a single battle, several standard-bearers have been cut down one after another; but as fast as the flag fell from one hand it was caught up by some other and kept waving, till the doubtful day was decided.

Sometimes in a panic the frightened, flying regiments have been rallied round the flag, and led back to the front to win a lost battle, and so a shameful defeat has been turned into a glorious victory. The annals of war are full of the noblest heroism of those brave men whose duty and delight it was to carry the colors. Rather than let the flag fall into the hands of the foe, it has been torn into fragments and divided among the remnant that remained after the day had gone against them. It has been burned to ashes and actually eaten, and its bitterness was sweeter to the taste than honey to the mouth.

So intent and eager to be the first to plant the flag on the enemy's ramparts have some good soldiers

¹ Marginal reading of the text.

been, that they neither knew nor felt, nor did they seem to care, when they found out that they were mortally wounded. At the famous battle above the clouds on Lookout Mountain, following the line of fire, the surgeons, those men of humanity, were climbing up the hilly steep, when they met four soldiers coming down, bearing in a blanket a shapeless mass. Laying their burden tenderly down on the ground, they asked one of the physicians to look at their wounded color-sergeant, whose body was badly broken by a shell; and kneeling on his knees beside his patient, and brushing the hair back from a manly brow with his hand, the surgeon said, "My brave fellow, where were you hit?" His eye unclosed for a moment, as he faintly answered, "Almost at the top." "No, no, my good man! where were you wounded, I mean?" Again his dying eye opened, again his pale lips parted, and he whispered, "I was almost at the top, sir, when the shell struck me: one moment more, and I should have been all the way up." He gave one more gasp only, and his noble spirit was gone to God who gave it.

At Rephidim the Israelites fought a great fight, and won a great victory over the Amalekites. And during all that dark and bloody day, as the tide of battle ebbed and flowed like the troubled sea, till finally the Hebrews held the field, Moses stood on the top of an overlooking hill with the wonder-working rod of God in his hand; and as it went up and down, so the victory wavered between the contending hosts on the plain below. When Moses' hands

became heavy and began to hang down, Aaron and Hur came to his help and "stayed up his hands"¹ till the going down of the sun. Joshua commanded in the fight, and skilfully manœuvred his men; and all the soldiers behaved splendidly, fighting with the greatest courage. But yet, after all, it was not the Israelites themselves, nor Joshua their chieftain, nor Aaron and Hur who held up the hands of Moses, nor Moses himself who held up the rod of God, nor was it all of them together; but it was the Lord alone who won the day. And when all was over, in grateful recognition of this blessed truth, "Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi," — the Lord my banner.

In the time of the Judges, when the combined forces of "the kings of Canaan," led by Sisera, were coming to lay waste the holy land, Barak and Deborah, with "ten thousand men" and the chiefest among ten thousand, went down from Mount Tabor and fell upon the invaders "by the waters of Megiddo," and gained a great advantage in the very beginning of the battle. And before the illustrious chieftain of the Canaanites could rally his broken and demoralized troops, the hitherto invisible and ever invincible allies of Israel appeared on the field. "They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera."² A terrible storm of "rain and hail"³ burst forth from the clouds, and straightway the shallow brook Kishon was swollen into a mighty river; and

¹ Exod. xvii. 12.

■ Judges v. 20.

■ Josephus, Bk. V. ch. v.

the mad waters of Megiddo came rising and racing and rushing down the sides of Lebanon, like the cavalry of the skies clothed with thunder, and spreading and prancing and charging over the plain they swept the enemy so clean away that there was not a man left. "The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon."¹

When the city of Jerusalem was beleaguered by the grand army of Assyria, Sennacherib sent a boasting and blasphemous letter to Hezekiah, asking him to surrender. He proudly recited the conquests that the Assyrians had made, and plainly intimated that it would be utterly useless to strive to hold out any longer against such victorious soldiers as he commanded. And, worse than all else, he attempted to destroy the king's confidence in Jehovah, and reviled the Lord of heaven and earth, "Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria."²

"And Hezekiah received the letter of the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up into the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord."³ The good king did not call a special meeting of the cabinet to consider the insulting and impious communication; nor did he summon his captains-general to the palace and hold a council of war, thinking that they might devise some plan for raising the siege. He "conferred not with flesh and blood,"⁴

¹ Judges v. 21.

■ 2 Kings xix. 10.

~ ³ 2 Kings xix. 14.

■ Gal. i. 16.

but immediately took the letter to the temple, and kneeling at the mercy-seat he read it to "the Lord strong and mighty"¹ who dwelt "between the cherubim." "And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand."²

"Like the leaves of the forest when summer is green,
That host with their banners at sunset were seen ;
Like the leaves of the forest when autumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay withered and strewn.

"For the angel of death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed ;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved and for ever were still."

This same Jehovah Jesus, "the Lord mighty in battle,"³ is also our banner, and our banner-bearer. "There shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people ; to it shall the Gentiles seek."⁴ In great numbers the men of all nations are gathering round this standard now. They are coming from every country to enlist in the army of "the Lord's Anointed." The north and the south are coming, the east and the west are coming, to stand together under the banner of the cross unfurled and upheld by Immanuel's hand. And no matter how badly our long line of battle may be broken here and there by the terrible assaults of the devil and his angels, we shall hold the field in spite of all that they

¹ Ps. xxiv. 8.

² 2 Kings xix. 35.

³ Ps. xxiv. 8.

⁴ Isa. xi. 10.

can do, and at last we shall win the day. "If God be for us, who can be against us?"¹ "The Lord is a man of war: the Lord is His name."² "He it is that shall tread down our enemies."³

According to the first maxim in military science, the number of soldiers brought into the field should be equal to that of the enemy. "What king going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?"⁴ But, when fighting under the captain of our salvation, numbers are not to be taken into the account, and no such precaution is necessary.

When Asa was on the Lord's side, the Lord was on his side, and gave his army an easy victory over twice as many Ethiopians. Jonathan and his armor-bearer won a much greater victory when they twain surprised and smote a whole garrison. When it was put into Jonathan's heart to attack the Philistines in their stronghold, he said to his attendant, "Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that the Lord will work for us: for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few."⁵ The way to the fort was so narrow and steep that they were obliged to climb up on their hands and feet. At the first onset they slew "about twenty men," and the rest were so frightened that they fled and went to fighting with one another;

¹ Rom. viii. 31.

² Exod. xv. 3.

³ Ps. lx. 12.

- ⁴ Luke xiv. 31.

■ ■ Sam. xiv. 6.

for "every man's sword was against his fellow," and so "the multitude melted away." With Jesus one is a majority, and more than a match for the whole world. Were He always with us, "How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight."¹

In entering upon a campaign, the best equipments are deemed as indispensable as an adequate number of troops. All the nations of the earth are busy just now furnishing their soldiers with the most modern and effective war weapons. Such great improvement has been made in their construction of late, that it would be madness to take the field with inferior arms and ordnance. But, if we are enrolled among the sacramental host, it makes no matter whether the weapons of our warfare are old or new, good or bad : they shall prosper all the same.

At the siege of Jericho, rams' horns were better than battering-rams. In the valley of Elah, David's sling was more to be desired than Goliath's sword. And the trumpets and pitchers and lamps of Gideon's three hundred brave men caused such consternation and confusion among the Midianites, "by the hill of Moreh," that they destroyed themselves. "Lo, a cake of barley-bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it that the tent lay along."²

It is also thought essentially necessary to establish camps of instruction, where the newly enlisted men may be drilled for many days in the use of their arms

¹ Deut. xxxii. 30.

² Judges vii. 13.

and taught the tactics of their profession before going into battle, because raw recruits cannot be relied on. But in Immanuel's army the last enlisted men and women and children are superior to the oldest and best-trained troops of the enemy. At the battle of Megiddo, Barak's volunteers behaved better than Sise-ra's veterans ; they behaved better, because the Lord went before them as their standard-bearer, — "the chiefest among ten thousand."

And in making war under the most favorable circumstances the result is never certain. "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong."¹ The ablest general in the world, commanding the largest and best equipped and most skilful army, cannot tell how any battle will end until it is ended. At Waterloo, Napoleon was the strongest every way. He had the most men, and they all spoke one language ; he had the most guns, and the best, and he knew best how to use them, and his officers were all "men of renown."² And as the tide of battle ebbed and flowed, like a lake of fire and brimstone, over the bloody field, he thought he saw the expected end, and actually sent three messages to Paris saying that he had won the victory. "Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off."³ But the good soldiers of Jesus Christ are sure that they shall win in all their conflicts with the world and the flesh and the devil ; and when buckling on the armor of God and marching to the field they can

¹ Eccl. ix. 11.

² Gen. vi. 4.

³ 1 Kings xx. 11.

send up this shout of triumph, "We ARE more than conquerors, through Him that loved us." ¹

But "my Beloved" is better than a standard-bearer. He is the chiefest in my affections, as well as the first in the field; and, though I be "less than the least of all saints," I am the chiefest in His affections. Indeed, if we do not love Him more than we love our flesh and blood relations, we cannot be His disciples. "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me." ² Our nearest and dearest earthly friends are strangers in comparison of Christ. And we are persuaded that He loves us with a love that is truer and tenderer than the love of kindred.

On a very memorable occasion, and in the most public manner, and in language that cannot be misunderstood, He Himself has told us so: "While He yet talked to the people, behold, His mother and His brethren stood without, desiring to speak with Him. Then one said unto Him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with Thee. But He answered and said unto him that told Him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And He stretched forth His hand toward His disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." ³

The love of kindred is very sweet and precious.

¹ Rom. viii. 37.

² Matt. x. 37.

³ Matt. xii. 46.

The father's heart is garnered up in his cherub-like child. To provide for his wants, he will rise up early, and sit up late, and labor and toil without murmuring, and eat the bread of carefulness. If need be, he will deny himself all the comforts of life to make his only son comfortable and happy. He spares no pains, and is even pleased to make many sacrifices to give him a good education ; and, as he grows up, his heart is more and more bound up in the lad. His thoughts are ever with him ; and, whether at home or abroad, his beloved boy is his constant companion, and he hopes to live to see him become a blessing to the world. And even if that son should be spoiled, and become a prodigal, and wander far away and lead a wicked life, his father's heart would wander with him, and love him still.

You remember how dearly and how deeply David loved Absalom. He loved him still when he became the guilty ringleader of the great rebellion, and was striving to overturn his father's throne and take his father's life. As the government troops were about to march to take the field against his own son, behold how like a loving father David addressed them, saying to all the captains, " Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom." ¹ And when the battle was over and ended, and the swift messengers were returning with the tidings, the king did not inquire whether his soldiers had gained a victory ; but the first question was, and the second question was, and the only question was : " Is the young man

¹ 2 Sam. xviii. 5.

Absalom safe?" "Is the young man Absalom safe?"¹ And when he learned that his dear son was dead, he poured out his soul in this most pathetic lamentation that ever burst in such a flood of feeling from a father's broken heart: "O my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"²

And a mother's love is even dearer and deeper than a father's love. Step into this darkened room, and see this self-denying and devoted mother bending over the wasted form of her sick and suffering babe. For days and weeks, without undressing, that loving mother has watched with and waited on her beloved child. She cannot rest, she will not try to rest till she can see some change for the better. But alas! no such change seems coming: on the contrary, his little cheek grows paler, his pulse beats feebler, and every symptom waxes worse and worse. In downright anguish she sends in haste after "the beloved physician."³ How she listens for the sound of wheels in the stony street! How long the lingering moments seem! And when, at last, the wise man comes and looks at the little patient, how hopes and fears alternate rise in that maternal bosom. How can she give up her one only child? How can she part with such a precious treasure? She will not entertain the awful thought. See how she wakes that her son may sleep! How she weeps that he may smile! And how more than willing she would be to die, if only he might live!

¹ 2 Sam. xviii. 32.

² 2 Sam. xviii. 33.

³ Col. iv. 14.

But the love of Jesus is better than the love of father, and more to be desired than the love of mother. "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up."¹ "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee."² Dearer than the love of fondest parents, and deeper than the love of the most devoted children, is the love of Jesus. He is above all and before all and better than all, the first and last and best.

"The fairest of ten thousand fairs,
The sun among ten thousand stars."

Years ago, in the persecuting times, a pious woman was put on trial for the crime of loving Jesus, and worshipping Him according to the dictates of her own conscience. At first the magistrate counselled her to recant, but she could not deny Jesus. He then threatened that he would take away her husband from her, and she calmly said, "May it please your honor, my Jesus is my husband." "I will take away your child," said the judge; and she answered again, "My Jesus is better to me than ten sons." "I will strip thee of all thy outward comforts," sharply said the judge once more. "Yea, but Jesus is mine," she quickly replied; "and you cannot strip me of Him." The sweet thought that Jesus belonged to her, and could not be taken from her, and was more to her than all other beloveds, cheered her heart, and changed

¹ Ps. xxvii. 10.

² Isa. xlix. 15.

her womanly weakness into more than manly strength ; and she was not afraid to confess Him in the presence of His enemies.

When "it is toward evening,"¹ and the twilight of time is darkening into the night of eternity, there is none worthy to be compared with Jesus. In all things and everywhere He must have the pre-eminence. Let those I love forsake me and mine own familiar friends forget me, let the soft and silken ties of flesh and blood be broken, my Jesus will stand by me evermore ; and when going down into the valley of the shadow of death, and my eye is growing dim, in the darkness there I shall see His smiling face ; and when my ear is growing dull in the swellings of Jordan, I shall hear His pleasant voice bidding me to come unto Him ; and when every human hand must let me go, with the wings of an ardent longing to be at rest for ever, I will fly to His embrace.

In the last moments of his life Stephen saw Jesus, and was sustained by Jesus, who had a sweet sympathy ready for His first martyr. His murderers were gnashing on him with their teeth, and making haste to take up stones to stone him. "But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God."²

But Stephen is not the only angel-faced saint who has seen the Saviour in the last and most trying hour.

¹ Luke xxiv. 29.

² Acts vii. 55.

I have sometimes heard the dying talk as if they saw Jesus, and they did see Him.

With closed eyes and clasped hands, one lately said in my hearing: "Beautiful Jesus! Beautiful Jesus! The chiefest among ten thousand. The one altogether lovely."

Another looking upward with an earnest gaze, and stretching out both her arms as if they were angel wings already, exclaimed, with a tongue that could scarcely do its office, —

"Jesus, lover of my soul,
Let me to thy bosom fly."

Asking another, "How do you do to-day?" he answered: "Oh, I feel a great deal better, but I shall never be well again; for I have been called away. Last night One stood there at the foot of my bed in shining garments, and, calling me by name, He said, 'Come, Thomas, I have come for you;' and do you not think that that was Jesus?" I answered, "Perhaps it was only a dream;" but he said, "No, it was not a dream, for I was not sleeping, — it was Jesus." Of which I was thoroughly convinced myself, when a few days afterwards Jesus came again with the horses and chariot of heaven, and took him in, and as the angels held the reins they drove away in rapture to the skies, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.

Even when the mind has become so weak that earthly friends were all forgotten, Jesus has been remembered and recognized. The name which is above every name, the name that endureth for ever,

has quickened the failing intellectual faculties, and kindled the brightest flame of love in the dying heart when all other loves had lost their magic power.

As a distinguished saint of a former age was quietly passing away, his family and friends gathered round his dying-bed and asked him if he knew them; but he answered no every time, and to every one. At length his loved and loving wife took him by the hand, saying, "My dear husband, do you not remember me?" And he said, "Who are you?" She replied, "Why, I am your wife." "Oh," said he, "I did not know that I had any." After a few moments, a minister approached and asked him if he remembered Jesus, and he answered quickly, saying, "Oh, yes! I do remember Jesus. I have known Him for more than forty years."

Another old disciple, having received several strokes of paralysis, had forgotten every thing except religious matters. He could not distinguish his own house, and often entered the wrong dwelling when coming home; but he knew the house of God, and never went astray when going to the sanctuary. He did not recognize any of his friends, but he knew the Saviour. It was quite impossible for him to hold connected conversation with any one on any subject; but morning and evening, at the family altar, he always conducted the devotions of the household with entire correctness of thought and language. As the outward man was perishing, the inward man was "renewed day by day."¹

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 16.

As another of whom the world was not worthy was trembling on the border line of eternity, a beloved daughter ministered to him, anticipating all his wants. It was better than her meat and drink to smooth the dying pillow of her departing parent. As the last sad hour drew near, she noticed that his pale lips were moving, and putting her ear near to them she heard him softly saying, "Bring." And she said, "Father, what shall I bring?" but he answered her not a word. In a little while she saw his lips again in motion, and listening she heard him saying the same thing, "Bring;" and throwing her arms around his neck, with strong crying and tears, she exclaimed, "Dearest father, do tell me what shall I bring?" but there was no reply as before. After a long pause, during which he seemed to be praying, he raised himself up in bed, and making a manifest effort to speak once more, in a calm, clear tone of voice, he repeated these words:—

"Bring forth the royal diadem,
And crown Him Lord of all."

And in that glorious heaven to which he has gone, and to which we are going too, Jesus is and will ever be the chiefest among "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands."¹ There is a great multitude there which no man can number, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands. There are also angels there, and archangels, cherubim and seraphim; but Jesus is above them all and better

¹ Rev. v. 11.

than all. "Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." ¹

The chiefest in heaven and the crowning glory of heaven is my beloved Jesus, and without Him there could be no heaven. In comparison of Him, the gates of pearl are nothing, the golden streets are nothing, the sea of glass is nothing. These all are less than nothing, and not worthy to be compared with Jesus. Before the brighter, purer, holier presence of "the King in His beauty," ² the angels shall disappear as the stars by day, and all the splendor of the skies shall suffer an eclipse before the far out-rivalling brightness of His glory, who is "all and in all," ³ and all without all.

Spirits of just men made perfect, angels that excel in strength, and dear kindred who are waiting at the gate to minister unto me an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom, ye are not my heaven. My Jesus is my New Jerusalem, the heaven of my heart, and the heart of my heaven. "And the name of the city from that day shall be, The Lord is there." ⁴ The providential gifts of Jesus are good, His sweet graces are better, but Himself is best of all; and though the place which He is now preparing for us must be most magnificent, yet without Jesus, who is the light thereof, it would not be half so attractive as this "Valley of Baca" ⁵ through which we are passing.

¹ Eph. i. 21.

² Isa. xxxiii. 17.

³ Col. iii. 11.

⁴ Ezek. xlviii. 35.

⁵ Ps. lxxxiv. 6.

And this we believe is the best and most scriptural idea of heaven. It was John's idea, without doubt. He saw heaven in a vision. The celestial country was all unveiled before his admiring eyes, and he attempted to describe it; and we love to read about the holy city that "lieth foursquare,"¹ with its twelve gates, and the river "clear as crystal" running through it, and the trees of life yielding twelve kinds of fruit every month; and whose leaves are for healing. But after seeing all that he saw, did you ever notice how he closes his last and most wonderful book? "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."²

This was also Paul's idea of heaven. More highly favored than John, "he was caught up into paradise,"³ whether in the body or out of the body he could not tell, but he was there. He walked the golden streets, and stood by the bank of the river of life, "and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." But when the time of his departure was at hand, he did not express a wish to hear and see the unspeakable things again. He only said, "I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better."⁴

This also was David's idea of heaven: "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee."⁵ The Psalmist had many friends on earth, for he was King in Jerusalem; but in comparison of his dear Lord, even Jonathan was a stranger. And he had some friends in heaven.

¹ Rev. xxi. 16.

² Rev. xxii. 20.

³ 2 Cor. xii. 4.

⁴ Phil. i. 23.

⁵ Ps. lxxiii. 25.

He had a father there, and a mother, and a dear little child for whom he wept and fasted and prayed, and of whom he said, "I shall go to him."¹ But all these loved ones were quite forgotten when He was remembered who is "the chiefest among ten thousand."

And as for ourselves, though now the material splendors of the heavenly Jerusalem, and the thoughts of meeting there those who are not lost but gone before, are much in our minds, yet, if we ever get there, for a while at least we shall think of nothing but the "Lamb as it had been slain,"² and see "no man, save Jesus only."³

"The bride eyes not her garment,
But her dear Bridegroom's face :
I will not gaze at glory,
But at my King of grace ;
Not at the crown he giveth,
But on His pierced hand :
The Lamb is all the glory
Of Immanuel's land."

How much, how very much, we ought to love our dear Lord Jesus, who is both our hope of glory and the glory of our hope ! Bend every sheaf to Joseph's. Jesus, the best be thine. Bow every knee to Jesus, "the chiefest among ten thousand." And changing the hymn from the Old to the New Testament, sing, sing every tongue to Jesus : If I forget thee, O Jesus, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth ; if I prefer not Jesus above my chief joy.

¹ 2 Sam. xii. 23.

² Rev. v. 6.

³ Matt. xvii. 8.

HIS HEAD.

CHAPTER IV.

"His head is as the most fine gold."

OFTEN in the word of God the most precious things in the world are taken to show the Saviour's worth. And while it is always pleasant and profitable to contemplate these Bible emblems which were selected by the Holy Spirit to be the shadows of the Saviour, yet, after all, the best of these come like a cloud, though it may be a cloud of incense, betwixt us and our Beloved, "until the day break, and the shadows flee away,"¹ when we shall see Him "face to face." Till then we must be content to see Him "through a glass, darkly,"² with the help of such scripture spectacles as are divinely suited to the dimness of our eyes.

In the inspired description of His person, now coming under review, His head is likened to gold, fine gold, "the most fine gold."³ Gold is one of the most precious metals, and in the mines of earth it is found in different degrees of purity, and is often mixed with many worthless substances. Occasionally it is found in a perfectly pure state, and so free from any dross that it needs not the refiner's fire. And this best and brightest and purest gold is here taken to reflect the value and beauty of the Saviour's head.

¹ Cant. ii. 17.

² 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

³ Cant. v. 11.

It would be hardly worth while to inquire whether "the most fine gold" was intended to represent the head, or only the head dress, of our heavenly Prince. It is well known that the ancient kings powdered their hair with gold-dust, and often wore a crown of gold, which was rendered more beautiful and valuable by reason of the precious stones that were set in it. Though He was born a king, Jesus had no crown to wear till the very last day of His sojourn amongst us. Then "a crown of thorns"¹ was platted, and placed upon His head, in mockery of His royal claims.

But before He came to earth Jesus had a crown to wear, and after He went home again to heaven He had more than one. "On His head were many crowns."² For every kingdom of His He has a crown, as the emblem of His rightful authority. But, with His many crowns or without them, the Saviour's "head is as the most fine gold;" not only very precious, but essentially necessary, to the being and to the well-being of His beloved and believing people.

In a certain proper sense the head is the fountain of life. We do not mean to say that that mysterious thing the life of the body has its source in the head, and that it runs down thence into the several members, causing them to live and move. The real fountain of physical life has never yet been found, and doubtless never will be found, in the body; because it does not properly belong to any member in particular, nor to all the members in their oneness.

¹ John xix. 2.

² Rev. xix. 12.

The body of Adam was nothing but a curiously wrought lump of clay till God breathed into it "the breath of life,"¹ and ever since the human race has been indebted to the divine pleasure for its existence. And, as the work of creation is expressly ascribed to the second person in the Trinity, it may be truly said that Jesus is the author of our life. "In Him we live, and move, and have our being."² The heart begins to beat just because Jesus bids it; it continues to beat just because Jesus bids it; and it ceases to beat just because Jesus bids it. "Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth? are not his days also like the days of an hireling?"³

But, while all this is strictly true, there are some members of the body which are essentially necessary to our existence. The hands and feet are very useful, and nobody would like to part with them; but yet they might be removed, and the person deprived of them would survive, and sometimes they have all been amputated of a set purpose to preserve the precious life that was endangered by their maimed and mortifying presence. But without the head, the whole body would die at once. So without Christ's presence and preserving power as "the head of every man,"⁴ the whole race would cease to be, as speedily as John the Baptist ceased to breathe when he was beheaded.

Properly speaking, there is no such thing as natural life. That which is commonly so called is super-

¹ Gen. ii. 7.

² Acts xvii. 28.

³ Job vii. 1.

⁴ 1 Cor. xi. 3.

natural life, and Jesus is its author and preserver. And in the bestowment of the blessing of existence He is no respecter of persons: He gives and preserves the lives of those who do not love Him; He gave Pilate the very "power"¹ to condemn Him; He nerved the hands that hammered the nails through His hands and feet; and, when He was dead, He supported the arm that thrust the spear through His side into His broken heart.

And now, as always, His enemies are indebted to Him for those days they spend in doing nothing else than blaspheming and bringing reproach upon His blessed name. If only this fact could be recognized, what a revenue of glory would rise to "the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ"!² Gratitude to the giver of life, with all its blessings, would be going up day and night, without ceasing, from every part of the earth, "like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense."³ But we do not realize this truth, and there are many who have never heard of it, and not a few who do not believe it. And therefore it is not strange that the sweet-smelling savor of praise to Jesus is so seldom offered.

We have heard of persons who, having been rescued from impending death, dedicated the remnant of their days to those who plucked them back from the grave that was opening to receive them. And little children who were lost and found, have taken the names of those who found them, and all the rest of their lives was consecrated to their benefactors. They could

¹ John xix. 11.

² Tit. ii. 13.

■ Cant. iii. 6.

not honor them enough, nor love them enough, nor do enough for them. And in this cold, unfeeling, and unfriendly world, there is something heavenly in such gratitude between man and man.

And if we could be thoroughly persuaded that we are indebted to Christ for our life and its preservation from a thousand dangers every day, all the rest of our sojourn here would be a song of praise to Him ; every thought would be the waking of a sweet melody to the name of Jesus ; and every step would be the starting of a stately psalm to our exalted Head, who made us, and who hath given His angels charge over us in all our ways, to bear us up in their arms, lest at any time we should dash our "foot against a stone." ¹

Dearest Saviour, "all my springs are in thee," ² and all the streams should return to thee, their source: "For with thee is the fountain of life." ³ "Unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again." ⁴ Help me, Lord, to devote my life entirely to thee ; because it came from thee, and is thy constant care. All the love my heart can feel, all the work my hands can do, and all the glory my tongue can speak, shall be thine henceforth : for I am thy child, my God ; I am thy betrothed, O Jesus.

But there is another and a better life than that of the body. There is a mind in man, and its life and growth are entirely dependent upon the head. There

¹ Ps. xci. 11.

² Ps. lxxxvii. 7.

³ Ps. xxxvi. 9.

⁴ Eccl. i. 7.

can be no question but that the brain is the seat and source of all intelligence. The arts and sciences were born in the head, and all the useful inventions and improvements, and books without number. The mind is the mother of them all. The Apollo Belvidere, and Paradise Lost; the Transfiguration by Raphael, and the magnetic telegraph, — are the fruit of the intellect. The brain budded and blossomed and brought them forth. They are only the outward clothing or expression of the thoughts of thinking men. And, indeed, the whole history of the world is nothing else than the surprising story of the progress and development and triumphs of the mind. "As cloud on cloud, as snow on snow, as the bird on air, as the planet rests on space in its flight, so do nations of men and their institutions rest on thoughts."

And in attaining the perfect stature in Christ Jesus, the intellectual part of our nature must not be neglected; and in the plan of salvation, the best and most abundant provision is made for its development. It is a blessed truth that the way of life is so plain that "the way-faring men, though fools, shall not err therein."¹ But the way-faring men will not walk very far therein before they cease to be fools. United to Christ their Head, where wisdom in perfection dwells, they shall soon become wise themselves, and increase in wisdom and knowledge more and more. "The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple."²

¹ Isa. xxxv. 8.

² Ps. cxix. 130.

In one of our Southern States there was a colored woman, above eighty years of age, who had such a great desire to get an education, that she worked for her board during the day, and went to school in the evening. She had to commence with the alphabet; but so constant was her application that she learned the letters in a few days. As soon as she had mastered them, she said to her teacher: "Now I want to learn to spell the name of Jesus first, for 'pears like the rest will come easier if I learn to spell that blessed name first." And so it is, and so it ever will be. All things will come easier to those who learn the name of Jesus first. All wisdom and knowledge and understanding shall be poured into their minds by Him who is the light of the world as well as its life; "If so be that ye have heard Him, and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus."¹

But there is another and a higher life than the physical and intellectual: there is a spiritual life, and Christ is its fountain also. It flows down from Him in heaven as the river flows from the mountain spring. Our physical life is good, our intellectual life is better, but our spiritual life is best. The first is gold, the second is fine gold, the third is the most fine gold.

The natural man enjoys only the blessings of existence, and education perhaps. He breathes the balmy air, and sees the sweet and pleasant light, and enjoys all the pleasures of sense and taste. He may be very wise, and very wealthy, and have troops of friends to entertain him. He may be a man of

¹ Eph. iv. 21.

great power and influence, — the one to whom “five talents”¹ were given ; and by his works he may have placed the whole world under tribute to his usefulness ; but yet he may be poor and miserable and blind and naked. He may be dead. He is dead.

So are all those who have been born but once. They are dead while they live. The soul has eyes, but they were born blind ; the soul has feet, but they cannot walk ; the soul has hands, but they are withered. Once the soul of man was the holy habitation of the Most High, and from every faculty the divine image was reflected. But now the faded glory, and the house left desolate, too plainly show that the heavenly guest is gone : “How is the gold become dim ! how is the most fine gold changed !”²

In one of Ezekiel’s visions, the valley was “full of bones.” And the bones were not only very many, but “they were very dry ;”³ and, when by the preaching of the prophet, they came together, bone to his bone, and the flesh covered them, they were all dead. There was no life in them, and the dead bodies were no better than the dry bones, and the place where they were scattered about was nothing but a sepulchre. Such is the natural condition of the race. We are all dead in trespasses and sins. But “Can these bones live ?” “O Lord God, thou knowest,” and thou knowest that they can. The Holy Spirit breathes upon them, and they stand up, “an exceeding great army.”⁴

¹ Matt. xxv. 15.

³ Ezek. xxxvii. 2.

² Lam. iv. 1.

⁴ Ezek. xxxvii. 10.

The conversion of the soul is as much a miracle as the resurrection of the body. Regeneration is a new creation. Christ must breathe upon us by His "quickening spirit,"¹ before the better life can be begun in us. And the spiritual life begun by Him must be sustained by Him, as it is written, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me."■

The holiest saint derives all his good desires, all his holy affections, and all his heavenly aspirations from Christ, his spiritual head; and if it were possible to put the saint and the Saviour asunder, the saint would cease to be a saint, and die; just as the hand would die if separated from the head from which it derives its vital power, just as the branch would die when severed from the living vine. "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned."³

We have often seen a heavy piece of iron clinging to another, not welded nor linked nor riveted, and yet it cleaved with such tenacity that it would bear not only its own weight, but much more also. A small wire charged with an electric current was in contact with it, and hence its adhesion. Cut or remove that wire by a hair's breadth, and the piece of iron falls like any other unsupported weight.

A stream of life from the Lord in heaven, coming

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 45.

■ Gal. ii. 20.

³ John. xv. 6.

in contact with our spirits, keeps us cleaving to the Lord so firmly that all the devils down in hell cannot put us asunder. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"¹ From Him the mysterious life-stream flows; it runs through all our being, and to Him it returns again. In this charmed circle we are held in perfect safety; but if the circle be broken, or we wander beyond its constraining power, Christ is become of no effect unto us, and we "are fallen from grace."²

Jesus, Master, my great Master, hold thou me up by the mighty and magnetic power of thy love, "lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."³

The head is the ruler, guide, and overseer of the body, and has the whole complex machinery under its special charge. That which is aptly called "the golden bowl"⁴ is only the golden canopy under which the soul sits like a queen, and rules over the whole man; and the several members of the body are the servants of the soul, and they are the most willing and obedient servants. When she bids the feet to walk, immediately they begin to move; and when she bids the hands to work, quick as thought they commence their task.

We look with our eyes, and listen with our ears, and speak with our tongues, and always as we are commanded by our supreme sovereign; and the government of the body might be called an absolute

¹ Rom. viii. 35.

² 1 Cor. ix. 27.

³ Gal. v. 4.

⁴ Eccl. xii. 6.

monarchy. Without a cabinet, and having no counsellors, the mind manages the realm of the whole man. The emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and physical natures are all superintended by the soul. We laugh and weep, work and play, eat and sleep, as the brain determines.

And, from Adam downwards to the present day, there has been no dispute amongst the members of the body, nor any rebellion against their head. Dividing the labor amongst themselves, and dwelling together in unity, and working together for their common welfare, they are perfectly contented, because they are in perfect subjection to their head, by which they are crowned and controlled, not more for the sake of the head than for their own sakes. Rebellion in the body against their ruler,—there can be no such thing; but, cut off from their head, the several members would be nothing, and could do nothing except to die.

So Christ is the Sovereign ruler of every Christian man. We are His body, and He is our head, and we owe allegiance to Him; and if the law of the land comes in conflict with His will as revealed in His word, there is no room for debate: we must always respect the higher law and the higher lawgiver, and obey them rather than “the powers that be,” though they “are ordained of God.”¹

When Peter and John were arrested in Jerusalem for preaching the gospel, and commanded not to speak any more in the name of Jesus, they promptly

¹ Rom. xiii. 1.

replied, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."¹ And when they were arrested the second time for the same offence, and cast into prison, they nobly said to the high-priest and his high court, "We ought to obey God rather than men."² They would not be silent, because they could not be silent. In their opinion the authority of Christ was superior to the authority of Cæsar.

In the body no other member could take the place of the head. The hand could not rule over the rest of the members, neither could the heart. Each member must keep its own place, and do its own work, and obey every suggestion of its supreme ruler. So every member of the Saviour's mystical body must be obedient to His will.

It is a distinguished honor to be members of the Saviour's body. We are His eyes, and His hands, and His feet: "For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones."³ And His eyes should be always looking for Him, His hands should be always working for Him, and His feet should be always running on errands of mercy for Him.

O thou "blessed and only Potentate! the King of kings, and Lord of lords,"⁴ come and reign in us, and rule over us, and make us more loyal, leal-hearted, and loving to thee; "bringing into captivity every thought"⁵ to the obedience of thy law, which is love.

¹ Acts iv. 19, 20.

² Acts v. 29.

³ Eph. v. 30.

⁴ 1 Tim. vi. 15.

⁵ 2 Cor. x. 5.

The head sympathizes with the body in all its joys and sorrows. All the nerves run into the brain ; or rather they all run out of the brain, like so many telegraphic wires, into every part of our framework of flesh. If I dash my foot against a stone, the hurt is felt first in the head, and just as much, and perhaps more, than in the foot itself.

All the members of the body are united together, and have a tender feeling for one another. They share each other's joys and sorrows, each other's health and sickness. "Whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it ; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it."¹ But as the members of the body are more intimately united with the head than they are with one another, it must needs have more sympathy for them than they do for one another.

But the sympathy that the head feels for the members of the body is at best but a faint image and feeble expression of Christ's sympathy for His suffering people. He is in closest and most constant communication with all His members, and He cannot help having a fellow-feeling for them and with them. When His own hands are bound with chains, shall Jesus not know ? when His own feet are made fast in the stocks, shall Jesus not feel ? and knowing and feeling the sufferings of His own members, shall He not suffer with them ?

When the ancient covenant people were passing through the "smoking furnace," I believe that the

¹ 1 Cor. xii. 26.

flaming fires reached up to their Head in heaven, and that Jesus suffered all their wrongs. "In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them." ¹ And I am quite sure that when Saul of Tarsus was going about, like a wild beast, "breathing out threatenings and slaughter" ² against the saints, he was striking higher than he knew. His blows reached away beyond the sky, and were keenly felt by the Lord Jesus in heaven; as the persecutor himself learned on the road to Damascus when he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest," ³ — a truth which he afterwards learned "more perfectly" when that same Jesus was persecuted so much, and for so many years, in his own mortal body.

And now as ever and for ever the Saviour shall sympathize with all His saints in all their sorrows. "For we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." ⁴ He has lost nothing of His tenderness, and He never will. He is their Head, and He cannot help having a fellow-feeling for them and with them in all their sufferings.

And, dearly beloved, if any of you are walking in darkness to-day; if you are in great distress; if your name is cast out, and your good is evil spoken of; if you are sometimes tempted to think that the moun-

¹ Isa. lxiii. 9.

² Acts ix. 1.

³ Acts ix. 4.

⁴ Heb. iv. 15.

tains of Bether betwixt you and your Beloved are impassable, and that you are forgotten and forsaken, — I counsel you to be of good cheer : because “ Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart ; ” ¹ and “ He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of His eye.” ²

And best of all, in a little while you will see Him coming “ leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills,” ³ and “ showing Himself through the lattice,” ⁴ and bringing a change of season to your souls. “ Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.” ⁵ Come into my body, and the living temple shall be dedicated to thee for ever. “ Come into my mind, that all my waking thoughts may be like thine, and when I am sleeping cause me to dream of thee. Come into my heart and make it the holy of holies. Search me “ with candles.” ⁶ Discover all the sins that may be walking “ delicately ” within me, and I will hew the Agags “ in pieces ; ” ⁷ and every room in my house shall be swept and garnished and “ preserved blameless ” ⁸ for thee, my heavenly guest. Come into my business and sanctify my calling, that every thing may be done in thy name and for thy dear glory. Come into my home, and make it more and more like heaven. Come into thy garden, and bring a change of season to the church. The ways of Zion miss thy goings, “ my God, my King,” ⁹ and mourn for thy gracious presence. Let it please thee to look upon the palms of thine hands,

¹ Ps. xcvi. 11.

² Zech. ii. 8.

³ Cant. ii. 8.

⁴ Cant. ii. 9.

⁵ Rev. xxii. 20.

⁶ Zeph. i. 12.

⁷ 1 Sam. xv. 33.

⁸ 1 Thes. v. 23.

⁹ Ps. lxxviii. 24.

and remember that which thou hast "graven"¹ there ; and "in the midst of the years make known, in wrath remember mercy."² Come into the world, and "the time of the singing of birds"³ shall continue all the year round and in every zone. As wearying and watching for her son's return, "the mother of Sisera looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the wheels of his chariots?"⁴ so I am looking and longing for thee, my royal Bridegroom. How long, O Lord, how long shall be that "little while"⁵ after which mine eyes shall see thee in thy beauty? Make haste, my Beloved, and come quickly. Bind Satan, make an end of sin, and with thy blessing blot out every remnant of the curse everywhere. Hear the groaning of the ground and disappoint not "the earnest expectation of the creature,"⁶ but let it be delivered from the bondage of corruption, and the desert of Sahara shall "blossom as the rose,"⁷ and become a place "of flocks"⁸ like Sharon. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost for "so great salvation:" "Our cattle also shall go with us, there shall not an hoof be left behind."⁹

¹ Isa. xlix. 16.² Hab. iii. 2.³ Cant. ii. 12.⁴ Judg. v. 28.⁵ Jno. xvi. 16.⁶ Rom. viii. 19.⁷ Isa. xxxv. 1.⁸ Isa. lxv. 10.⁹ Exod. x. 26.

HIS LOCKS.

CHAPTER V.

"His locks are bushy, and black as a raven."

ABUNDANCE of hair adds much to the appearance of a person, and was given to mankind for an ornament and a glory, as well as for a covering ; and its natural color, whatever that may be, corresponds best with the complexion, and is far more comely than when changed by artificial means. But it is obvious enough that, in the opinion of many, black hair is the most becoming, and rather to be desired for this very reason.

And as the beauty of the Saviour's person is the main burden of our theme, the hair of His head could not be quite overlooked ; and, having been sketched by an inspired pencil, it is most worthy of our prayerful consideration. We may not pass it by as a matter of little moment, because in every feature of the man Christ Jesus there is something more than beauty : there is meaning also ; and though the first is always good, the last is always better.

We cannot help being drawn to Jesus by the powerful fascination of His comeliness ; but when the hidden mystery of His engaging charms is made more manifest, we are more willing and ready to run after Him. The more we see of Jesus, the more we see in Jesus ; and the more we see in Jesus, the more

precious Jesus becomes to us ; and the more precious Jesus becomes to us, the more anxious we will be to make Him known to others. "While I was musing the fire burned : then spake I with my tongue." ¹

Sometimes, like the weeping prophet, whose life was a lamentation, I have been tempted to keep silence, and for the same reason, too. "Then I said, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name. But His word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay." ² And not His word only, but Jesus Himself, was in my heart as my heavenly guest, and I could not refrain from speaking of Him. It is better than my meat and drink, it is better than my necessary sleep, to point out the peerless perfections of Jesus ; and by lifting Him up in the sweet attractive graces with which He has adorned Himself, He shall draw all men unto Him.

And in no other attribute of His character does Jesus appear more attractive to His friends than in His immutability, which is evidently foreshadowed in His bushy locks of raven blackness : for without controversy this must be the meaning of His thick-set, dark, and curling hair ; so that the truth here taught is, after all, the principal thing. The beauty of Christ's person is crowned by the greater beauty of His perfections ; and the one now coming under review is rather comely, and, by reason of its princely beauty, possesses much magnetic power.

¹ Ps. xxxix. 3.

² Jer. xx. 9.

Jesus is a young Saviour, and a strong Saviour. "The glory of young men is their strength."¹ He was still a young man when He closed His wonderful career on the cross; for He was only about thirty-three years of age. Almost as soon as He attained man's perfect stature, He was made "an offering for sin."² The "green tree"³ was cut down in the early summer, and the head of Jesus was laid low in the grave long before the time of old age. Some of the Old Testament types, like the "lamb of the first year,"⁴ the "young pigeons,"⁵ and the "green ears of corn,"⁶ seem as if they were intended to prefigure the Saviour's youth. And what He was, He is, and ever will be, "this same Jesus"⁷ "with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."⁸

Of course we are speaking now chiefly of the Saviour's divine nature, because in His human nature He was in many respects as changeable as we are. As a helpless babe, His most blessed mother, Mary, often carried Him in her kind arms, and sung Him over to sleep on her gentle bosom; "and the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon Him."⁹ "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature,"¹⁰ and learned to walk and speak and think, just as we did. He passed through all the changes of childhood and youth, till He became a perfect man in mind and body both; and then for

¹ Prov. xx. 29.

■ Luke xxiii. 31.

⁵ Lev. v. 7.

⁷ Acts i. 11.

■ Luke ii. 40.

² Isa. liii. 10.

⁴ Lev. xii. 6.

■ Lev. ii. 14.

⁸ James i. 17.

¹⁰ Luke ii. 52.

us men, and for our salvation, He was put to death in the prime of life.

And had He not been crucified and slain, no signs of decay would ever have appeared upon His pure and perfect human nature, because He was not born to die, as we are. Though the days of His years had been "nine hundred sixty and nine years,"¹ though He had been older than the oldest man that ever lived, no mark of age had ever been seen upon Him. His eyes had never become dim like Isaac's, and never would He have worshipped like Jacob, "leaning upon the top of His staff."² His sinless humanity was immortal in itself, like the bodies of our first parents in paradise; and was not subject to those sad changes that have come upon us, by reason of their first transgression.

And the interesting fact that His mission was ended almost as soon as He became a man seems to have been so ordered that we might think of Him as one who was never old, and never will be old. "The Ancient of days"³ is ever renewing His youth "like the eagle's."⁴ He is "the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star."⁵ Before Abraham was, and "not yet fifty years old."⁶ And when we remember that "in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily,"⁷ there can be no doubt of His perpetual unchangeableness. His human nature, even without the divine, would have

¹ Gen. v. 27.

² Ps. ciii. 5.

³ Col. ii. 9.

⁴ Heb. xi. 21.

⁵ Rev. xxii. 16.

⁶ Dan. vii. 9.

⁷ John viii. 57.

been for ever exempt from disease and death ; but, united with the divine in one person, it must needs remain the same in all ages, past, present, and to come. "The same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." ¹

It would be almost a waste of time to attempt to prove a truth which is so plainly revealed. Nevertheless, as there are some who stand in doubt of the Saviour's unchangeableness, and others who deny it altogether, we may be pardoned for counting up a few of the many arguments by which this doctrine may be established.

It will be readily admitted, by those who have read the New Testament without prejudice, that Jesus was a perfect man, free from every blemish, and adorned with every virtue. But a perfect man appearing in the earth, in any age since the gates of Eden were closed against the race, must needs be more than man. He must be God as well as man, and God can never change. "I am the Lord, I change not." ²

Besides, if the Saviour were susceptible to change, it would be for the better or the worse ; as every change implies the gain or the loss of something. But a person already perfect could not acquire a greater degree of excellence ; and to suppose that it were possible for Christ to suffer the loss of any of His attributes, would bring him down to the level of our lost humanity, and make Him altogether like one of ourselves.

Moreover, the acts, attributes, and perfections of the Divine Being are ascribed to Jesus. "All things

¹ Heb. xiii. 8.

² Mal. iii. 6.

were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made.”¹ He is everywhere present: “Lo, I am with you alway.”² And His knowledge is infinite. All things are open to Him, and even the darkest recesses of the human heart are not hid from Him. “Lord, thou knowest all things.” Would that we could finish this finest saying of Simon Peter, “Thou knowest that I love thee!”³

But we will not tarry any longer on the dry land of argument: it is better every way to embark on the boundless sea of love; and here, as everywhere, the heart shall lead the head. We need a strong Saviour, for we are weak: we need a Saviour ever the same, for we are changeable; we need a young Saviour, for we are growing old. And, blessed be His glorious name for ever! all we need we find in Jesus. Just as in the joint the ball suggests the socket, so my soul suggests my Saviour. Like Noah’s dove, it flies abroad on timorous wings, seeking rest and finding none, till it returns to Him and rests in Him. “Return unto thy rest, O my soul!”⁴

Every thing else is changing. The mountains are not so high as they once were. Their lofty summits are sliding down their sides year by year. The everlasting hills are only everlasting in a figure; for they, too, are crumbling every day. And the hardest granite rocks are softening into soil every season, and we are actually eating them up in our daily bread. And the same sky which is over our heads is not the same

¹ John i. 3.

² Matt. xxviii. 20.

³ John xxi. 17.

⁴ Ps. cxvi. 7.

that it once was. The fixed stars are not stationary. Even the north-star is not always the same star. And the astronomers say that the sun is changing; and the time may come when he shall have burned up all his splendor; but now and then and evermore my Jesus shall be the fitting subject of this inspired song, which was first addressed to Him by David, and afterwards by Paul: "Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: they shall perish, but thou remainest: and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail."¹

Behold what an engaging and exalted view we get of the perfect character of our Beloved, by looking at Him through the glass of this glorious text: "His locks are bushy, and black as a raven."² If He were feeble in body or in mind, or if He were liable to become so; if He were vacillating in His plans and purposes; if He were a friend to-day, and a foe to-morrow; if He smiled and frowned on His people alternately, as they seemed worthy or unworthy of His favors; if at one time He loved the righteous, and at another time equally loved the wicked; if He formed a decree before the world began, which He changed when time commenced; or, if He is ever to be a different being from what He this day is, — we would not know what to depend on, and He would not be worthy of our worship. If He were to change

¹ Heb. i. 10-12.

² Cant. v. 11.

in any respect, or at any time; if "the evil days" should ever come when "the almond-tree"¹ would flourish on His head; if His almighty power should ever wane into weakness, "and the grasshopper" become "a burden;"² if the passing years should ever bend His form, or blind His eyes, or blanch His hair, or bring the second childhood, — how shorn of all His "glorious beauty"³ would be our beloved Jesus!

But, blessed be His name! it is just because decay in its business with all beside fleeth away, rebuked, from His presence, and the axe that is laid at the root of every other tree is never laid at the root of the tree of life; it is just because, when I think of Jesus, it is of one over whom the past, present, and coming changes cast not a single shadow of variableness: so that when "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up,"⁴ He shall sit serenely up above all these dissolving things, the unchanging Jehovah, — that my heart finds at His feet the most fitting place for all its affection, and my mind is overmatched in striving to comprehend His incomprehensible blessedness, and my silent tongue is loosed to cry in wonder, love, and praise, My Jesus, my Jesus, "Who is like unto thee? who is like unto thee?"⁵

How encouraging is this thought of the Saviour's immutability, to those desponding Christians who are much discouraged because of the way, often won-

¹ Eccl. xii. 5.

² Eccl. xii. 5.

³ Isa. xxviii. 1.

⁴ 2 Peter iii. 10.

⁵ Ps. lxxi. 19.

dering whether they will ever get safely to "their desired haven"!¹ We are all such great sinners, and the best of us are so bad, and find ourselves so frequently falling from our steadfastness, that we are often tempted to think that there is no good thing in us, and fear that we may be cast off; and we are quite sure that we deserve no better fate than the cast-away. We are so prone to wander and do wickedly, that the anxious question of the saint's final perseverance perplexes us very much; and we often wonder whether it can be true, and whether Jesus will bring such guilty sinners safely home to heaven at last. But when we are tossed about with such tormenting thoughts, dearly beloved, let us come back at once to this Rock of Ages, and build anew our hope of heaven upon the unchangeableness of that great Saviour, who hath undertaken the work of our redemption: "Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."²

Before the "wise Master builder" commenced to restore His ruined temple, He knew how much time and treasure and suffering it would require. He carefully counted the cost; and, having commenced the work, we may be sure it will never be abandoned: and it will never be said of Him,—as it is sometimes said of us when our enterprises fail,—"This man began to build, and was not able to finish."³ He is able to finish, and He is just as willing to finish, and nothing can prevent the accomplishment of His

¹ Ps. cvii. 30.² Phil. i. 6.³ Luke xiv. 30.

eternal plan. Before our illustrious Zerubbabel every mountain of opposition "shall become a plain;"¹ and having laid "a sure foundation,"² and given Himself for "the chief corner-stone,"³ He will carry on the work so well begun till He shall bring forth the head-stone in heaven, "with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace, unto it."⁴

Does my Jesus love me to-day? then He will love me to-morrow; did He ever love me in the time past? then He will ever love me in the time to come; did He die for me? then He will live for me; has He betrothed me to Himself for ever? then He will never discard me. I may behave so badly that the engagement ought to be broken, but it never will be; I may forget my Beloved and forsake Him, but He will never forget me nor forsake me: "The Lord sent Nathan unto David."⁵ I may go after other lovers, and give my heart to idols, but he will never entertain the thought of putting me away, either publicly or privately. "For the Lord, the God of Israel, saith, that He hateth putting away."⁶ In spite of our sinfulness and infidelity, He cannot give us up. "If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself."⁷ "Rise up, Balak, and hear; hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor: God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?"⁸

¹ Zech. iv. 7.² Isa. xxviii. 16.³ Eph. ii. 20.⁴ Zech. iv. 7.⁵ 2 Sam. xii. 1.⁶ Mal. ii. 16.⁷ 2 Tim. ii. 13.⁸ Num. xxiii. 18, 19.

Of a set purpose to calm my troubled mind, there comes this message from heaven unto me. It is a sweet paragraph from one of the love-letters of my Lord Jesus: "Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed; neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more. For thy Maker is thine Husband; the Lord of hosts is His name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; the God of the whole earth shall He be called. For the Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. For this is as the waters of Noah unto me; for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah shall no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee."¹

Oh, how sweetly comforting it is, in all time of trouble, to have such an unchanging friend!—one who is tried and proved, and who will stand by us in pleasant and in stormy weather. We sojourn in a world of sorrow, and many of our troubles come from

¹ Isa. liv. 4-10.

the changeableness of terrestrial things. Every thing and everybody is changing. The companions of our childhood are scattered abroad over all the earth, and not a few of them have finished their course. "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh."¹ At the end of five and twenty years only one-third of our classmates could be assembled in the old hive whence we swarmed; and when this remnant gathered round the table, and the roll was called as formerly, we could scarcely recognize one another. The snow that never melts was falling on us all, and some of us were old and gray-headed already. But Jesus, our companion in tribulation, never grows old. No "gray hairs are here and there upon Him."² His locks are bushy, and black as a raven, and the dew of His youth is still freshly resting on Him.

Our neighbors also are coming and going all the time, and often the changes in their circumstances are painful to contemplate. The wheel of fortune is ever turning, and casting down many into the most abject poverty; the hard earnings of industry and economy are lost or stolen; the treasures of earth are nowhere safe, and the "uncertain riches"³ are ever and again making themselves wings to "fly away as an eagle toward heaven;"⁴ but "the unsearchable riches of Christ,"⁵ and "the exceeding riches of His grace,"⁶ and Christ Himself, abideth with us evermore.

When she resided in the Holy Land, Naomi was a

¹ Eccl. i. 4.

² Hos. vii. 9.

³ 1 Tim. vi. 17.

⁴ Prov. xxiii. 5.

⁵ Eph. iii. 8.

⁶ Eph. ii. 7.

happy wife, and a rejoicing mother, and her outward estate must have been prosperous enough ; but, with her loving husband, and her two hopeful sons, she went away into the land of Moab, to escape the famine that came in Canaan. But in the land of plenty there was a sorer famine in store for her ; and, after about ten years she returned to her former home, a poor broken-hearted and childless widow. And as the kindly neighbors gathered round to sympathize with the sorrowful and seeming stranger, with lifted hands they cried, "Is this Naomi? And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?"¹

Such sad changes are to be expected in this changing world, and who has not experienced some of them? Where is the man who hath not seen adversity and affliction? Passing through this Valley of Baca, our filthy lucre may slip away, like quicksilver, through our fingers, and our dearest earthly friends must sicken, and slowly, and sometimes suddenly, they must melt from our embrace, and be buried out of sight. But, nevertheless, as we "have in heaven a better and an enduring substance,"² we can take joyfully the spoiling of our goods; and, better still, Jesus never sickens, Jesus never dies. He was dead once, and He died for me; but He rose again from

¹ Ruth i. 19, 21.

² Heb. x. 34.

the grave, and He rose again for me, and lives for me evermore ; my ever-living, never-dying, never-changing Husband.

But, before our loved ones vanish from our view, they may cease to love us. The warmest human affection is sometimes frozen over like the streams in the winter season ; and the spring never comes to melt the hard cold ice into rivers of pleasure. And the tale-bearer, whose tormenting tongue is sharper than the serpent's tooth, alienates my most cherished friendships. The estrangement touches me in the tenderest relations ; and, long before death comes, my home is left desolate. "My kinsfolk have failed, and my familiar friends have forgotten me. They that dwell in mine house, and my maids, count me for a stranger : I am an alien in their sight."¹ But there is one, Jesus, who remembers me most tenderly when I am forgotten, who clings to me most closely when I am forsaken, and who watcheth over me with an eye of most sleepless vigil when men frown on me darkly, with the eye of scorn. Who wonders, then, that loved by His unchanging heart, and upheld by His unchanging hand, and guided by His unchanging eye, we walk boldly life's wayfaring, turning our sorrow into joy with some such words on wheels, as these :—

"Oh, bless thee, bless thee, treacherous world,
That thou dost play so false a part,
And drive, like sheep into the fold,
Our loves into our Saviour's heart !

¹ Job xix. 14, 15.

This have I leaned upon, sweet Lord !
This world hath had thy rightful place ;
But come, dear jealous King of love !
Come, and begin thy reign of grace.

Banish far from me all I love, —
The smiles of friends, the old fireside ;
And drive me to that home of homes, —
The heart of Jesus crucified.

Take all the light away from earth,
Take all that men can love from me ;
Let all I lean upon give way,
That I may lean on naught but thee.”

MY EVER LIVING AND EVER LOVING SAVIOUR : I am growing old, and gray hairs are here and there upon me ; but thou art young and thy locks are bushy and black as a raven. “ Cast me not off in the time of old age ; forsake me not when my strength faileth.”¹ In my best estate I am like a reed shaken with the wind, and sometimes I am a bruised reed ; but, blessed be thy name, beneath the tenderness of those sweet hands of thine, the bruised reed shall not be broken. “ From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed : lead me to the rock that is higher than I ;”² and in the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts shall delight my soul. One generation passeth away and another generation cometh ; but thou remainest and thy years shall have no end. “ Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear unto my cry ; hold not thy peace at my tears : for I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner,

¹ Ps. lxxi. 9.

² Ps. lxi. 2.

as all my fathers were.”¹ Here have I “no certain dwelling place,”² and I am dying daily ; but “the Lord liveth : and blessed be my rock, and exalted be the God of the rock of my salvation.”³ “I am become like a bottle in the smoke ;”⁴ “I am like a pelican of the wilderness ; I am like an owl of the desert. I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the housetop.”⁵ “Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness :”⁶ but thou art my lover and friend and acquaintance, and thou art ever with me ; and every shadow on my path is only the shining of thy face. Yea, Lord, my home is changing ; my house is left desolate and my heart is sore broken sometimes ; but thou art my “dwelling-place in all generations,”⁷ the house in which I live, and my abiding home. And thou art more and better and dearer to me than all my kindred according to the flesh. “Whom have I in heaven but thee ? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.”⁸ My flesh and my heart faileth : but thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.

¹ Ps. xxxix. 12.⁴ Ps. cxix. 83.⁷ Ps. xc. 1.² 1 Cor. iv. 11.⁵ Ps. cii. 6-7.⁸ Ps. lxxiii. 25.³ 2 Sam. xxii. 47.⁶ Ps. lxxxviii. 18.

HIS EYES.

CHAPTER VI.

■ *His eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set."*

THE eye is the noblest, the most delicate, and the divinest member of the human body. It is the grand avenue gate to the sanctuary of the soul, and light is the grand avenue. There are other paths and other portals to the sacred shrine within us ; but the light of the sun is the shining way, and the eye is the beautiful gate of the temple. Between the organ and the medium of vision there is a perfect and wonderful adaptation, and it seems manifest enough that they were made for one another, — the eye for the light and the light for the eye, and both are beautiful and good. "Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun." ¹

How splendid is the early and increasing dawn ! First of all, the bright and morning star begins to lighten the eastern sky with its silvery beams, making what the prophet calls "the morning spread upon the mountains." ² And when it has opened wide enough "the eyelids of the morning," ³ through these two-leaved gates of day the golden sun himself appears, "which is as a bridegroom coming out of his cham-

¹ Eccl. xi. 7.

² Joel ii. 2.

³ Job xli. 18.

ber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race.”¹ And as he rises higher, stepping on his own ever-brightening beams, he smiles upon the face of nature, and the world puts on its coat of many colors, its gay clothing, its wedding garment, and is soon “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”²

But we are so familiar with this frequent spectacle, that it fails to make any suitable impression on our hearts and minds. We do not appreciate the sweet light and the pleasant sun. They come and go almost, if not altogether, without observation. “And seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive.”³ But if we were dwelling in darkness half the time of our lives, we would learn to set more store by the shining of the sun and the sense of seeing.

After the long dark nights of the arctic winters were over and past, Dr. Kane, with all his poetic fervor and powerful eloquence, seemed to be at a loss to find language strong enough to express the supreme delight with which the sun was welcomed back.

“To-day, blessed be the great Author of light! we have once more looked upon the sun. We had to climb the hills to get the luxury of basking in his brightness.”

“We saw him once more, and upon a projecting crag nestled in the sunshine. It was like bathing in perfumed water.”

“Every thing seemed superlative lustre, and unsurpassable glory. We had so grovelled in darkness that we oversaw the light.”

¹ Ps. xix. 5.

² Rev. xxi. 2.

■ Matt. xiii. 14.

The heavenly bodies which were created to be light-bearers, are not all of the same magnitude, nor do they shine with the same splendor. "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars ; for one star differeth from another star in glory." ¹ But the brightest lustre of the greatest and most glorious sun shining in his strength, is only the shadow of that Saviour of whom it is written, "Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings." ²

And although all eyes are alike in their general structure, and must needs be, because they were made by the same master-hand and for the same purpose, yet some are far-sighted, and some are near-sighted ; while other some are both, and possess the power of adjusting themselves to any distance within the range of their vision. There are also eyes beaming with beauty and beneficence, and others that are expressive only of evil passions. The eyes of beasts and birds differ but little from the eyes of men ; and the best and most beautiful of these are taken in the text as the most fitting emblems of the eyes of Jesus : "His eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set." ³

Doves' eyes are very pure. The dove itself is the emblem of purity, as well as the emblem of peace. It feeds only on the purest food ; delights in pure water brooks, and often bathes in them. In Old Testament times it was numbered among the clean

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 41.

² Mal. iv. 2.

³ Cant. v. 12.

things that might be offered for purification. When "Mary the mother of Jesus"¹ went up to the temple with her Holy Child, she took "a pair of turtle-doves"² as her offering on that occasion. And thirty years afterwards, when the Saviour was baptized, "the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon Him."³ And ever since this most blessed among birds has been taken as the heavenly symbol of the Holy Spirit.

The dove is also an emblem of Jesus Himself. Of the flying fowls of the air, it is the only one that the law permitted to be sacrificed as the image of Him. And, as it was the offering for the poor, it was laid on the altar oftener than any other. Besides, it was so pure and gentle and loving, and kept itself so much apart from all unclean birds, that it was a most fitting type of Him "who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners."⁴

But while the eyes of doves are pure, the eyes of Jesus are purity itself, — they are the very perfection of purity. The Saviour can see blackness in the brightest sunshine. "Yea, the heavens are not clean in His sight."⁵ Nothing that defileth, or worketh abomination, can remain one moment within the reach of His approving vision. "As the chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the floor, and as the smoke out of the chimney,"⁶ so the ungodly and their ungodly works shall be driven away rebuked from the

¹ Acts i. 14.

³ Luke iii. 22.

⁶ Job. xv. 15.

² Luke ii. 24.

■ Heb. vii. 26.

■ Hos. xiii. 3.

presence of Him who is "of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity."¹

In the black and dark night "certain lewd fellows of the baser sort"² may go forth in disguise "to work all uncleanness with greediness,"³ thinking that they are not seen; but "there is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves."⁴ As soon as Adam and Eve had eaten of the forbidden fruit, they were ashamed and afraid, and "hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God, amongst the trees of the garden,"⁵ but they were not hid. Achan had a care to secrete the stolen treasures in his tent; but they were not secreted. And when Ananias and Sapphira "sold a possession, and kept back part of the price,"⁶ it was not all among themselves: a third party was "privy to it."

The grossest darkness may cover the earth, and the greatest workers of iniquity may hope in some way to escape with impunity; but the everywhere-present and holy-seeing Saviour says: "Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down: and though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence; and though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them: and though they go into captivity before their enemies, thence will I command the

¹ Hab. i. 13.

³ Eph. iv. 19.

⁴ Gen. iii. 8.

² Acts xviii. 5.

⁵ Job. xxxiv. 22.

⁶ Acts v. 2.

sword, and it shall slay them: and I will set mine eyes upon them for evil, and not for good.”¹

These all-seeing eyes of Jesus are open over us always. They see all our goings-out and comings-in; they notice all our shortcomings and sinful wanderings; they scan not merely our outward conduct, but all our secret purposes: they are heart-searching eyes and rein-trying eyes. Before our thoughts are expressed by the tongue, or born in the brain, they are known to Jesus. He is acquainted with them afar off: and if they are holy like Himself, He takes pleasure in them; but if they are unholy like ourselves, He turns away in abhorrence from them, and from us also. The sinner is looked upon with loathing, because of his exceeding sinfulness. And if only we would remember this solemn truth, what a salutary influence it would have on our lives!

At home and abroad Jesus sees us. In the light of day, and in the darkness of the night, Jesus sees us. The best of us do many things which we would never do, and go to many places where we would never go, if our friends could see us. But Jesus sees us. His eyes are looking at us through the stars of the sky, and through the flowers of the field; and the rain and the dew seem like the tears that they shed when they see us doing those things that are not consistent; and in His book of remembrance all our works and words and thoughts are written, and by this record we will be judged in the last day, when the throne shall be set and the books shall be opened.

¹ Amos ix. 2-4.

Seldom has this truth of the Saviour's omniscience been better expressed than it was by a little lad who went with his father to a neighbor's corn-field to hold the bag while his father filled it with stolen ears. Just before the wicked work was begun, the child noticed that his father climbed up on the fence, and looked all round, — north, south, east, and west, — to be sure that they were not seen by somebody : and, taking him gently by the hand, the son said to his father, "Father, you forgot to look up." Never was a word more fitly spoken. It fell on the heart of a thief like a thunderbolt from a clear sky, and he went home to steal no more. So wherever we go, and whatever we do, let us never forget to look up, and let us remember that Jesus is always looking down : "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good."¹

Doves' eyes are watchful. Eyes were given to the fowls of the air mainly that they might be watchful for themselves and for one another. There are many dangers to which they are exposed ; and, unless they keep their eyes open, they are apt to fly into them unawares ; and none are so easily taken in the snare of the fowler as the harmless doves. They are so innocent and unsuspecting, that we are scarcely surprised to learn that thousands of them are often captured in a single day by the cunning sportsman. But "in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird."² In order to be successful in catching these confiding creatures, the net must needs be carefully

¹ Prov. xv. 3.

² Prov. i. 17.

concealed from the sight of their eyes ; because when they see the snare, they are sure to fly away, and so they avoid the trap that was set for them.

They often travel in such large flocks that the light of the sun is darkened, as with a passing cloud, and a note of warning from one is enough to shield the whole company from danger. But while all the flock have a care for one another, those that belong to the same family are particularly watchful over one another, and there is something beautifully touching in the tender devotion of the dove to his mate. Whether on the wing by day, or sitting near the nest by night, his eyes are open over her for good : nor can it be counted a strange thing if he should seem ready and willing at all times to defend her sweet and precious life at the expense of his own.

But the eyes of doves are blind when compared with the eyes of Jesus. This inspired image of the watchful care of our Beloved is not the express image. No, the shadow is not the substance, and the eyes of no creature can be equal to the eyes of the Creator. "He that formed the eye, shall He not see?"¹ Shall He not see better than any other being? His eyes are often spoken of in Scripture, and He is represented as looking down from heaven to behold the inhabitants of the earth ; and whilst He watches over all things in all places of His dominion, and cares for oxen, and birds, and fishes, we are taught to believe that He cares much more for man, who was made in His own image ; and, unspeakably more for those

¹ Ps. xciv. 9.

whom He hath created anew by His regenerating Spirit. His eyes are ever open to watch over them in all their ways. He gives His angels charge over them, to bear them up in their arms ; and, not only so, but " His own self " ¹ is the guardian angel of every one of them. " The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him." ² He is their shield, and with Himself He protects them in the day of battle. He is their strong tower, which can never be taken by storm or by stratagem. He is their safe asylum ; and hidden in the cleft of the eternal Rock, and covered with the shadow of His hand, no evil can ever come nigh them to hurt them.

When Joseph was cast into prison, the Lord was his keeper, and he found favor even in the sight of his enemies, and in due time he was released, and by a kind Providence was made prime minister of all the land of Egypt. When Jeremiah was shut up in a dungeon, the word of the Lord came to him as aforetime ; and when Jerusalem was taken, the king of Babylon gave the captain of the guard special charge concerning the prophet, saying, " Take him, and look well to him, and do him no harm ; but do unto him even as he shall say unto thee." ³ As soon as the three heroic Hebrews were cast bound into the burning fiery furnace, " Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the

¹ 1 Peter ii. 24.

² 2 Chron. xvi. 9.

³ Jer. xxxix. 12.

midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.”¹

And, blessed be His name! the form of the fourth is ever present with His people in all their troubles, to shut the lions’ mouths, to quench the violence of fire, and to preserve them from all harm. “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.”²

By day and by night, in the house and by the way, in the wildest sorrow, in the darkest dungeon, in the greatest danger, Jesus will be with you a sun and shield. “He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: He that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is thy keeper: The Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: He shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out, and thy coming in, from this time forth, and even for evermore.”³

Doves’ eyes are powerful, as, indeed, all eyes are. There is much meaning in their looks. The glance of approbation or disapprobation, as it would seem to be, exerts a wonderful influence upon these birds. They have no speech, nor language, but they can

¹ Dan. iii. 24.

² Isa. xliii. 2.

³ Ps. cxxi. 3-8.

speak with their eyes, and they can understand the meaning of a look. Anger and indignation and contempt, in fiery darts, often flash forth from the eyes of birds and beasts, and the serpent's gaze is proverbially powerful to charm. And amongst ourselves, who were made only "a little lower than the angels,"¹ and crowned with "glory and honor," the tongue is never so expressive and eloquent as the eye.

A father's eye speaks plainer to his erring child than any words that he might utter, and is more powerful than his rod, and the child understands its meaning perfectly. Frowns and smiles and tears have the same meaning in all ages, and among all nations. And there is not a feeling in the soul that may not be expressed on the face. "A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance,"² and a sorrowful heart maketh a sad countenance. There is "a bountiful eye,"³ "an evil eye,"⁴ and "eyes full of adultery."⁵ There is also the look of envy, and the look of jealousy, and the look of crime, each so peculiar to itself that it cannot be disguised. And "guiltiness will speak, though tongues were out of use."

When Jacob first entered Laban's family there was a welcome ready for him, and he found a happy home among his kindred. And, when he was married, the father-in-law was well pleased with his son-in-law. But the Lord prospered Jacob much more than his father-in-law, and Laban became jealous, and his change of heart was seen at once in his face. "And

¹ Ps. viii. 5.

² Prov. xv. 13.

■ Prov. xxii. 9.

⁴ Prov. xxiii. 6.

⁵ 2 Peter ii. 14.

Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and, behold, it was not toward him as before.”¹ When “Saul eyed David,”² the coming man comprehended the wrath of the king better than the bitterest words could explain it. And when, “The Lord turned, and looked upon Peter,”³ there was more power in that look than in any sentence of rebuke that He could have uttered, who spake as “never man spake ;” and as the broken-hearted apostle went out and wept bitterly, he needed no words to make the Master’s meaning more plain ; and His own sword could not smite half so hard as that glance of affection from the Saviour’s languid eye.

It is related of a certain Scottish Highland chief that, as he was advancing at the head of his clan to deliver a battle, he fell pierced by two balls from the enemy. His men, seeing their leader falling in front of them, began to waver ; but their wounded captain instantly raised himself upon his elbow, and, as the blood was streaming from his wounds, exclaimed, “I am not dead, my children ; I am looking at you to see if you do your duty.” So the great Captain of our salvation, falling as He did in the fore front of the battle, is not dead, but alive for evermore, and from His throne in glory He is looking down at us to see if we do our duty.

When the eagle warrior of France was about to commence an engagement, he usually addressed a few well-chosen words to his men, to inspire them with some of his own enthusiasm. But never did he animate

¹ Gen. xxxi. 2.

■ 1 Sam. xviii. 9.

³ Luke xxii. 61.

them with so much confidence and courage, as when, marshalled on the sandy plain, and pointing upwards, he uttered the thrilling sentence: "Soldiers, remember that from the summit of those Pyramids forty centuries contemplate your actions." At once the excitement was intense, and every man was ready to rush to the contest with as much bravery as if on his arm alone depended the result of that doubtful day.

But the Christ of all the centuries, the alone inhabitant of eternity, the "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last,"¹ is looking down on us from loftier heights from beyond the sky. He who wore the crown of thorns, but wears the crown of glory now, is surveying us from His royal seat; and in the light of His approving smile we can read this animating sentence: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."²

Doves' eyes look in all directions. They are so large and fitly set, or set in such fulness, that they can easily look upwards and downwards, on the right side and on the left, "before and behind."³ The range of their vision is round about. Such also is the range of the Saviour's vision; "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."⁴

The Egyptians, who expressed their conceptions by hieroglyphics, made an eye the emblem of the Divine Being, to teach that all things everywhere are open

¹ Rev. xxii. 13.

² Rev. ii. 10.

³ Rev. iv. 6.

⁴ Heb. iv. 13.

to His inspection. And the most blinded heathen of the present day believe that they are seen by the blind eyes of their idols, or the equally blind gods that they represent. And this truth, so dimly perceived by those who have no Bible, exerts a salutary influence upon their lives ; and it is better to be idolaters than atheists.

But the fact that Jesus sees all things everywhere, in all places of His dominions, is only a small part of the truth. He sees every thing that now is, every thing that ever was, and every thing that ever will be. With Him there is no yesterday, nor to-day, nor to-morrow. With one glance of His eye He comprehends what we call the past, the present, and the future ; and nothing can escape His observation. He forgets nothing, if we may speak so, and nothing can come to pass to surprise His omniscience. "He revealeth the deep and secret things : He knoweth what is in the darkness."¹ "Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done."²

In the prophetical writings He has described several of the kingdoms of this world, while as yet there was none of them. The rise and fall of universal empires are not only plainly pointed out by the pen of inspiration, but the exact number of their years is mentioned ; and profane history confirms the correctness of the divine word, and often unwittingly makes use of the same language in describing the same events. One of the universal kings was men-

¹ Daniel ii. 22.

² Isa. xlv. 10.

tioned by name many years before even his parents were born.

And as every kingdom appeared and disappeared at the time appointed, so it will be in the coming future. When the present nations of the earth have filled up the measure of their years, they shall pass away as those that went before them.

Nor does the Saviour look only on the great kingdoms of the world, and their great kings, and the great events that are taking place. To His all-seeing and equal eyes there are no great things nor small things ; and, if there were, the minutest would be just as much looked after as the mightiest. "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns. Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow ; they toil not, neither do they spin. Are ye not much better than they?"¹

Like the cloud that came betwixt the Egyptians and the Israelites, this blessed truth has a dark side and a bright side ; and, God be thanked ! we are on the bright side of it. Oh, how sweet and comforting it is to know that, though we are "less than the least of all saints,"² not one of us is overlooked ! "Thou God seest me,"³ — even me. "Thou knowest my downsit-ting and mine up-ri-sing, thou understandest my thought a-far off. Thou com-pas-sest my path and my ly-ing down, and art ac-quainted with all my ways. Thou hast be-set me be-hind and be-fore, and laid thine hand upon me."⁴ Yea the wheels of thy

¹ Matt. vi. 26, 28.

² Gen. xvi. 13.

³ Eph. iii. 8.

⁴ Ps. cxxxix. 2, 3, 5.

chariot are "full of eyes round about, even the wheels."¹

Doves' eyes are guiding. From the days of Noah down to the present time, doves have been used as messengers; and during the dreadful work of war, when all other means of communication are cut off, they are indispensable. In one of the chief cities of Europe, they are fed every day at the public expense, and by a special statute they are protected from harm. The reason why these birds are so kindly cared for is, because very many years ago a carrier dove brought to the government the good news of a great naval victory. Everybody was so overjoyed at the glad tidings, that a law was speedily passed that henceforth all doves should be provided for out of the public treasury, and the day never passes that they are not fed.

While these birds are yet young, they are carefully trained to the business of carrying messages. They love their home with a love almost, if not altogether, as strong as the love of life; and when they are taken away, as soon as they are released they return thither as fast as their wings can carry them.

It was once thought by some that they found their way to their nests from remote regions by a kind of instinct; but, as they fly low, and are lost if the air be misty, and as they cannot cross a wide expanse of water, it seems evident enough that they are guided by sight alone. As soon as they are let loose from confinement, they rise to a great height, circling round and round till

¹ Ezek. x. 12.

they see some familiar land-mark, and then they dart away, always in the right direction ; and, when the darkness comes down, they rest till the day dawns again, because in the night they cannot see their way.

And whether we are walking or working, we are guided by our eyes or the eyes of others. "The light of the body is the eye."¹ It illuminates all the other members. It discovers the way in which we should go, and directs all our steps. By far the largest part of our knowledge is obtained through the eyes, and this information was gathered up in part by the eyes of those who have gone before us. It is only of late years that the blind have been taught to pick up information with their fingers.

But, though much learning may now be obtained without the use of the eye, no man can walk safely unless he is guided by his own or the eyes of others. Coming to a dangerous pass in Switzerland, a timid traveller refused to proceed any further in that direction, saying to his guide, "I can never cross that chasm ; I would grow dizzy, and topple over, and be taken up dead, — if, indeed, I would ever be taken up at all. There is no use of trying : I will not make the vain attempt." But the guide remonstrated and reasoned with him, and said : "I have often crossed this narrow bridge, and I can teach you how to cross it, too." And, walking steadily to the other side, he called back to his companion, saying, "Look now neither to the right hand nor to the left. Look neither

¹ Matt. vi. 22.

above nor below, but fix your eyes on me and come!" And so doing he crossed the dangerous defile in safety.

So our Guide goes before us, and, "looking unto Jesus,"¹ we could go over the bottomless pit without falling into it. He has many ways of guiding us. He guides us with his word: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."² He guides us with His voice: "To-day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts."³ He guides us with a look, as He hath said, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye."⁴

Doves' eyes are love's eyes, and love's eyes are clear-sighted and quick-sighted, far-sighted and near-sighted. Almost immediately after the crucifixion, several of the Saviour's followers went a fishing. They "toiled all the night,"⁵ and "that night they caught nothing."⁶ Weary and wet and hungry and heavy-hearted, they are returning home. As they are drawing near to the place where they were accustomed to beach their boat, they see a seeming stranger, nowise noticeable, standing on the shore beside a fire of coals. The day is only just breaking in the east, and the light is neither clear nor dark; but, though sailors' eyes are sharp, the eyes of love are sharper still; and while his companions are conscious of the presence of some ordinary person, only the disciple whom Jesus loved, with his own sure instinct, per-

¹ Heb. xii. 2.

² Ps. cxix. 105.

³ Heb. iv. 7.

⁴ Ps. xxxii. 8.

⁵ Luke v. 5.

⁶ John xxi. 3.

ceives and proclaims the blessed truth, "It is the Lord."¹ The dimness of the dawning day, and the lingering darkness of the departing night, were like the double light of noon to the loving eyes of John, and he knows Jesus.

But if the eyes of love are so quick-seeing and so clear-seeing in the disciple, how much more and better must they be in the Master! Once, when the Saviour's friends were out on the Lake of Galilee, it was night, and the night was dark, and it was the darkest hour of the night; and, if it had been in the day time, they were out of sight of land, for when the storm was raging their little craft could not be seen so far as "five and twenty or thirty furlongs"² from the shore. But Jesus saw them from the far-away mountain side, where He was spending the night in prayer. He saw them quite as well as if He had been with them in the ship, and the sight of His eyes so affected His heart that He went unto them, walking on the water.

And now, as then and evermore, "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears are open unto their cry."³ He looks down upon us only and always through the eyes of His love; and the land and the sea, like the light and the darkness, are both alike to Him. His "way is in the sea,"⁴ and when we are tossing in the tempest, and "toiling in rowing,"⁵ He sees us from the high and holy mountain up in heaven. He sympathizes with us, and makes

¹ John xxi. 7.

² John vi. 19.

■ Ps. xxxiv. 15.

■ Ps. lxxvii. 19.

⁵ Mark vi. 48.

mention of us in His prevailing prayers, and in due season He will surely come to our relief.

It is an old, common, and Scripture simile, that likens life to a voyage ; and all Christians everywhere are out at sea, and they are all going "over unto the other side,"¹ hoping to cast anchor at last in the desired haven of eternal rest. But it is not a Pacific Ocean on which we are all embarked. The water is not always smooth, the sky is not always clear, and the weather is not always fair. To-day the sea is calm as an Alpine lake, the sky is like sapphire, and the weather is so exceedingly pleasant that we seem to be nearing the land of Beulah, beyond which Love's own country lies. To-morrow the sea is rough, and tossing beneath the tempest's wrath ; the heavens are "black as sackcloth of hair ;"² and the weather is so foul every way that we are driven from our course, and can hardly tell whither we are drifting.

Perhaps, with you who read these pages, the sky may now be dark, so dark that for many days neither sun nor stars have shined there. And the sea seems very stormy indeed, swept as it is only by contrary winds, and threatening every moment to open its big black mouth and swallow you up. The quadrant, the compass, and the chart, — all are useless now, for you can neither take your bearings, nor tell whither you are drifting, nor sail at all except by anxious soundings. But fear thou not, because the voice of joy and thanksgiving, and glory in the Highest, shall yet be heard above these water floods. The Man of

¹ Mark iv. 35.

² Rev. vi. 12.

the fourth watch is not forgetful of you. The Man whom the winds and waves obey will not permit them to overwhelm you. Look ye yonder : there He comes already, walking on the troubled water, treading down the boisterous billows with His blessed feet ; and, high above the rushing wind, and raging sea, and roaring thunder, I hear Him sweetly saying, " Be of good cheer ; it is I ; be not afraid." ¹

" Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things." ² " He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet ; so He bringeth them unto their desired haven." ³

For many years the southern extremity of Africa was known as the Cape of Storms, by reason of the high winds that prevail in that locality ; but, just as soon as the discovery was made that it pointed out the way to the treasures of India, it was called by the better name of the " Cape of Good Hope." So, as we are sailing in search of the exceeding riches of grace and glory, every stormy point along our destined course, every temptation, every failure, every affliction should be to us another Cape of Good Hope, pointing us more surely, guiding us more safely, and speeding us more swiftly onward to that heaven which is already the home of our hearts, because our best treasures are there. " So He bringeth them unto their desired haven."

¹ Matt. xiv. 27.

² Ps. lxxii. 18.

³ Ps. cvii. 29, 30.

MY DEAREST LORD, "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

HIS CHEEKS.

CHAPTER VII.

"His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers."

THE beauty of flowers is confessedly the crowning glory of the material world, and it is difficult to conceive how the flowers of paradise could have been fairer and more fragrant than those with which the earth is everywhere adorned; and yet these most exquisite emblems of Eden are here taken to represent, as much as they may, the face of Jesus. "His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers;"¹ both fragrant and fair, sweet and smiling.

But, whilst we appreciate the comparison, and are pleased to observe that it is the most appropriate that could be chosen even by the mind of the Spirit, we are constrained to say that the world wears on its bosom no blossoms so beautiful and pure and sweet of fragrance as the face of our Beloved; and in the better country, "where grow such sweet and pleasant flowers as nowhere else are seen," there will none be found forever, so goodly to look to, as the white and ruddy leaves of Sharon's fair and bleeding Rose.

In the human form, which was fashioned after the similitude of Him who created it, the face is the noblest, the brightest, and the divinest feature. Indeed, it is often called "the human face divine." It

¹ Cant. v. 13.

is the index of the inner man, the mirror of the mind, the open window through which we can see much of the soul within. A man's moral character is often so clearly written in his face that he who runs may read it, and "the way-faring men, though fools, shall not err therein."¹ The cheeks are the printed pages of a book that all can understand. To the stranger we are often insensibly drawn by the pleasant expression of an open countenance, which declares plainly that he is good and gentle and kind-hearted. We do not need to know his name nor his history, because his looks are his best letters of commendation, and we confide in him immediately and implicitly.

So the face of Jesus is His most prominent, interesting, and engaging feature. And though it is so pleasant to dwell upon it, I am almost tempted to pass it by in perfect silence; for, "though I could speak with the tongues of men and of angels,"² I could not depict the surpassing beauty of the Saviour's face. In His living day, it is said, a certain rich man, hearing of His fame, sent a painter to take His portrait; but, when the artist came into His imposing presence, he was unable to attempt the task, by reason of the peculiar splendor that sat enthroned upon that countenance which was "the express image"³ of the eternal Father.

Nor is it strange that the divine art has ever failed to do justice to the divine man. "The glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"⁴ was beyond even the

¹ Isa. xxxv. 8.

³ Heb. i. 3.

² 1 Cor. xiii. 1.

⁴ 2 Cor. iv. 6.

pencil of inspiration. It could not be expressed in any way ; but it may be experienced, and has been by many : " For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." ¹

That father of the fathers, Augustine the African, once said that there were three things he regretted he had never seen. The first was " Christ in the flesh," the second was " Paul in the pulpit," and the third was " Rome in her glory." These three things might have been counted among the wonders of the world. The city of the seven hills was " exceeding magnifical, of fame and of glory throughout all countries." ² Paul was the prince of preachers, the chiefest of the apostles, the ablest and most successful minister of the New Testament. But Christ in the flesh was " God with us," ³ — God incarnate, He whom the heaven of heavens could not contain, dwelling in a human form. Yes, these three would have been great sights ; but the greatest of these would have been " Christ in the flesh." And, again, when this same distinguished saint was writing on the text, " Thou canst not see my face : for there shall no man see me and live," ⁴ he penned this earnest petition : " Then, Lord, let me die, that I may see thy face."

And in every age there have been those whose hearts were like to break for the longing they had to see Jesus, " whom having not seen " ⁵ they loved.

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 6.

² 1 Chron. xxii. 5.

³ Matt. i. 23.

⁴ Exod. xxxiii. 20.

⁵ 1 Pet. i. 8.

The character of Christ, His purity, amiability, and disinterested benevolence, all shone in His face ; and not only so, but the very character of God Himself, was revealed in the face of Jesus. The nature of Him whose name is Love was written as with sweet flowers in the face of His Anointed.

And there were times when the light of His countenance shone forth with the glory which He had with the Father before the world began. Awed by the superhuman power of His commanding presence, the multitudes in Nazareth¹ and Jerusalem² gave way before Him, in spite of themselves, as the waters clave before the ark of God, "which stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people."³

When He transfigured Himself on the "mountain apart," the bed of spices bloomed, and the sweet flowers blossomed with a beauty all divine. "The fashion of His countenance was altered,"⁴ "and His raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow, so as no fuller on earth can white them,"⁵ "and His face did shine as the sun."⁶ And so dazzling was the majestic sight of the Rose of Sharon in full bloom, that the disciples were scarcely able to gaze on the excellent glory ; and, overcome with the blinding brightness beaming from the beatific face of Jesus, they "were sore afraid,"⁷ and fell to the earth.

So when Judas and his companions went to apprehend the Saviour in the garden, just as soon as they

¹ Luke iv. 30.

² John viii. 59.

³ Ps. lxxv. 7.

⁴ Luke ix. 29.

⁵ Mark ix. 3.

⁶ Matt. xvii. 2.

⁷ Matt. xvii. 6.

came into His presence, the record says, "they went backward, and fell to the ground."¹ The wickedest man that ever lived, and his scarcely less wicked companions, were smitten down to the ground in Gethsemane by the light of the Saviour's countenance. The sight of their eyes, when looking in the face of innocence itself, so affected their hard hearts, that they could not stand upon their feet.

Precisely the same effect was produced upon the red-handed Saul of Tarsus and his attendants, when they were going to Damascus, with authority to arrest the Saviour's friends who might be found in that city, and "bring them bound unto Jerusalem."²

"At mid-day, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me."³

The prince of persecutors was more than prostrated by "the heavenly vision:" he was actually blinded by the brightness of the Saviour's personal presence. The rising of the Sun of righteousness eclipsed the brightness of the natural sun at noonday, and quenched all the light in the eyes of Saul; and "they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus, and he was three days without sight."⁴

Of all the disciples, John the Divine was, doubtless, the Saviour's most familiar friend. Like Joseph and his Benjamin, like David and his Jonathan, so was

¹ John xviii. 6.

² Acts ix. 2.

³ Acts xxvi. 13, 14.

⁴ Acts ix. 8.

Jesus and that "disciple whom Jesus loved."¹ At the first communion John had the highest place of honor next to Jesus: "which also leaned on His breast at supper."² He was the disciple who became a loving son to "Mary the mother of Jesus;"³ and from the cross he "took her unto his own home."⁴ And by John's perfect love, all fear seemed to be cast out of his heart, for he was upon the most intimate and endearing terms with the Master.

But when from the isle of Patmos he caught one little glimpse of the "appearance of the likeness"⁵ of the glory of Christ in heaven, shining brighter than the "seven golden candlesticks," and the "seven stars," and the sun "in his strength," he "fell at His feet as dead."⁶

And in that last day, for which all other days were made, when God shall "judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained,"⁷ the universe itself shall disappear before the majesty of the Saviour's glory. Affrighted and confounded by the suddenness and sublimity of His second coming, and, as if conscious of the nearness of their Creator and unworthy and unable to remain for one moment in His most holy presence, the things that were made by Him shall make themselves wings and fly from His sight. "I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them."⁸

¹ John xx. 2.

² John xxi. 20.

³ Acts i. 14.

⁴ John xix. 27.

⁵ Ezek. i. 28.

⁶ Rev. i. 17.

⁷ Acts xvii. 31.

⁸ Rev. xx. 11.

Even sinful flesh is sometimes beautiful beyond expression. The marred clay is often called angelic. The fond mother can find no language fit to shadow forth the fascinating charms of her cherub-like child. The Old Testament makes mention of some who were "exceeding fair" and "goodly to look to." Such were Sarah and Rachel and Moses and David ; and, last, but not least, Absalom ; for "in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty : from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him." ¹ What, then, must have been the indescribable beauty of the "holy child Jesus," ² who was born without sin, who was anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows, and who was "fairer than the children of men," ³ — who was and is, and is to be for evermore, the brightness of the Father's glory, "the express image of His person," ⁴ and in whom "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" ? ⁵

By contemplating the beautiful face of our blessed Jesus, we are changed into something of the same likeness. It is the common law of our nature that our moral character is moulded and made by the persons with whom we associate, and the objects which we contemplate. We adopt the views of our most intimate friends, and insensibly imitate their manners, and are assimilated to their minds. We think and feel and act like them. And, not only so, but to a certain extent we look like those we love.

¹ 2 Sam. xiv. 25.

■ Heb. i. 3.

² Acts iv. 27.

⁵ Col. ii. 9.

³ Ps. xlv. 2.

The mind has a moulding influence even on the body, and the same thoughts will impress themselves in the same lineaments. The husband and wife, when they love each other "as Christ also loved the church,"¹ by their constant communion and fellowship begin to wear the same expression ; and their features seem so much alike that the resemblance is often more marked and manifest than the family likeness which is seen in brothers and sisters, and not unfrequently the twain, who are one, are taken for children of the same parents.

So by gazing at the sweet flowers blooming on the Saviour's cheeks, they begin to make their appearance on our own. They are transplanted to the faces of the friends of Jesus. "The Rose of Sharon" takes root in the congenial soil of the new heart ; and its blossoms are soon seen in our Christian graces ; and "the Lily of the valleys,"² budding in our own well-doing, proves its identity with the rare exotic that came from heaven, by the kindly smile we give to others.

In the world around us there are many interesting illustrations of this law of assimilation, as it may be called. "If you bring a piece of common iron into contact with a magnet, it becomes a magnet, too ; nor does the magnet lose any of the strength it lends to make another like it. The strange virtue actually grows by giving itself away. And the blackest storm cloud, when the sun stoops to kiss its weeping face, and smiles upon its falling tears, changes into glory

¹ Eph. v. 25.

² Cant. ii. 1.

excelling, and presents to our admiring eyes the most beautiful appearance in nature, and the bow shall be in the cloud."

Such also is the transforming power of the vision of the Saviour's face. The power of objective beauty produces subjective beauty. The light of our Beloved's countenance makes that countenance like it on which it shines.

It was so with Moses, when he came down from Mount Sinai, where he had communed with God for forty days and forty nights. "Behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come nigh him."¹ The light of Jehovah's countenance still lingered on His servant's own, and that holy man of God brought away from the holy hill the brightness of His glory whose fellowship he there enjoyed.

It was so with Stephen also. When he was put on trial for the crime of preaching Jesus and His great salvation, "All that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel."² That angelic beauty that beamed from the face of the first Christian martyr was borrowed from above: it was the face of Jesus reflected from the face of Stephen.

And in some measure this is so with us, also, even now. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is."³ By looking unto Jesus, we become like Jesus. Beholding the King in

¹ Exod. xxxiv. 30.

² Acts vi. 15.

³ 1 John iii. 2.

His beauty, we borrow His beauty, — His beauty of holiness, His beauty of loveliness.¹ And though, like Moses, we may be unconscious of any change in our outward appearance, others shall see it, and shall take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus. "We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."²

But now our best visions of Jesus are only partial and occasional. We do not behold all His beauty; nor do we behold Him always. Our best faith cannot see Him as He is; and, although the communion Sabbath is confessedly the top of the hill where He is transfigured before us, yet, when the holy solemnities are over and ended, we must come down from the mount, and He vanishes from our view: "For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known."³

And better still, the perfect vision will be perpetual. Faith will then be lost in sight, and every other medium shall be removed away for ever, and we shall

¹ "The sagacious traveller Nicolai states that he saw the most divinely beautiful female countenances among women who were most devout. The calm contemplation of loveliness, where affection blends with adoration, seems to act most powerfully in tranquillizing and exalting the features. Doubtless, the apprehension of spiritual truth, being absolute, the reflex of the divine mind would possess the mind with a more heavenly idea, and correspondingly transform the whole being." — *The Body and Mind*, by Dr. Moore, p. 86, quoted by Dr. Burrowes, in his *Commentary on the Song of Solomon*, p. 238.

² 2 Cor. iii. 18.

³ 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

see Jesus as we now see one another. This is one of the exceeding great and precious promises, "Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty."¹ Thine eyes. Not thy faith, nor the eyes of thy soul only; but these eyes, thine and mine, shall see the King with glory crowned: "For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another."²

Yes, I shall see my Jesus! I shall see my Jesus "face to face"! I shall see my Jesus "as He is"! The thought of this is a weight of glory. The hope of it is an exceeding weight of glory. The fulfilment of it will be "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."³ I can ask no more, — I can bear no more. Lord, it is enough, it is enough. "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness."⁴

"With gentle swiftness lead me on,
Dear Lord, to see thy face;
And meanwhile in my narrow heart
O make thyself more space!"

These partial views of Jesus which we have here, and the beatific vision we hope to have in heaven, should fill us with holy rapture. We may rejoice much in our present privileges; we may rejoice more in our future prospects. The partial view of Jesus

¹ Isa. xxxiii. 17.

² Job xix. 25-27.

³ 2 Cor. iv. 17.

⁴ Ps. xvii. 15.

is pleasant ; but the perfect vision will be more pleasant. The occasional sight of "Him whom my soul loveth"¹ is precious : it will be more precious to stand for ever in the "presence of His glory with exceeding joy."² Now when we see Him "through a glass darkly" we are glad ; but who shall measure up our gladness when we shall see Him "face to face" ? We count ourselves happy here if we may catch a casual glimpse of Him as He is passing by, if we may touch but the "hem of His garment ;"³ but how much happier we shall be hereafter when these eyes shall see Jesus, when these feet shall run after Jesus, when these arms shall embrace Jesus, when these lips shall kiss Jesus !

Dearly beloved, brethren of every name, companions "in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ,"⁴ these privileges are yours, these prospects are yours. Things present and things to come, all are yours. Therefore I say unto you, "Rejoice in the Lord always."⁵ What, then ? And again I say unto you, Rejoice, for "thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty." And never for ever shall the mountains of Bether rise between you and your Beloved ; nor shall you be separated by any lattice ; nor shall the smallest cloud come to dim the light of your everlasting marriage-day, during which you shall enjoy in the marriage mansion —

"The Prince's sweetest kisses,
The Prince's loveliest smile."

¹ Cant. iii. 3.

² Jude 24.

³ Matt. ix. 20.

⁴ Rev. i 9.

⁵ Phil. iv. 4.

“Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken ; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate : but thou shalt be called Hepzi-bah, and thy land Beulah : for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married. For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee : and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.”¹ “He will rejoice over thee with joy ; He will rest in His love.”² And you shall rejoice over Him with joy ; you shall rest in your Love ; and your rest and your joy shall be glorious and eternal.

“Unfading lilies, bracelets
Of living pearl thine own :
The Lamb is ever near thee,
The Bridegroom thine alone.”

If only I could end this meditation here, I would be glad. But I may not, must not, close this chapter without a word in season to those who have never seen “the King in His beauty,” and have no “good hope through grace”³ that they ever will. Yet you, too, shall see Jesus : if not in His beauty, you shall see Him in His wrath. “Every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him : and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him.”⁴ And they shall pray then, if they never prayed before, saying to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.”⁵

¹ Isa. lxii. 4, 5.

² Zeph. iii. 17.

³ 2 Thess. ii. 16.

⁴ Rev. i. 7.

⁵ Rev. vi. 16.

MY EVER BLESSED, BEST BELOVED, AND MOST BEAUTIFUL JESUS: When thou saidst unto me seek ye my face, my heart said unto thee, thy face, Lord, will I seek. I beseech thee show me thy glory. O Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds. But, blessed be thy name, there is something better than liberty, there is something better than even life itself. Thy loving-kindness is better than life. And my heart's desire and prayer to thee is, that I may be lifted up into the brightest light of thy best love, and the sweetest music of thy great salvation. Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely. Having joined hands with thee, may thy hand strengthen mine; having joined hearts with thee, may thy heart comfort mine, and having leaned my head on thy bosom at supper, may thy face shine on mine, till my face shall shine like thine. Thou that dwellest in the gardens, thy companions hearken unto thy voice, cause me to hear it. Cause me to hear it every morning and every evening and every moment. Come down to me in the cool of the day, and in the heat of the day, and in the night watches, and walk with me, and talk with me, and abide with me, till all my blackness shall be transformed into thy glorious beauty, and my cheeks like thine shall be as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers. And while all the good of my transfiguration shall be mine, all the glory shall be thine, world without end. Amen.

HIS LIPS.

CHAPTER VIII.

"His lips like lilies, dropping sweet-smelling myrrh."

TAKEN in a literal sense, we believe that the lips of Jesus were more beautiful than the most beautiful lilies that ever bloomed, even in Eden ; and the sweet words that fell from them so frequently, were sweeter far than the sweetest-smelling myrrh that was ever discovered in this world.

We must say further, that, in the garden of glory, when paradise shall be regained, there will be seen no flowers flourishing there so beautiful as the lips of our Beloved : nor will all the myrrh of the better country have such a sweet-smelling savor as His loved and loving words.

"Never any lilies in nature dropped myrrh, but nothing in nature can fitly set forth the beauty and excellency of Christ ; and therefore to do it by comparison, there must be a composition of images."

Jesus was the Great Prophet, as well as the Great Priest and King. He was the "Teacher come from God."¹ He was God Himself, and His words were all divine, and they could be nothing else than pure and perfect. "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."²

¹ John iii. 2.

² John vi. 63.

The best of all the Pagans, the almost Christian Plato, set in order many faithful sayings; but the swarm of bees said to have settled on his lips could not make his words half so sweet as the words of Jesus. No philosopher or priest or poet or prophet or apostle, or angel from heaven, has ever spoken the truth with so much power and grace and beauty as He who, above all others, had "an unction from the Holy One;"¹ and thrice happy are they who are permitted to sit at His feet, and learn lessons of wisdom pertaining to the life that now is and that which is to come.

Better than anybody else, the Holy One of God knew what to say, and when to speak. To Him was given "the tongue of the learned,"² that He should know "how to speak a word in season" to those who are weary. At the early age of twelve years, He had the tongue of the learned. In returning home from the passover feast His mother missed Him, and thought that He was lost; but He was in His Father's house and about His Father's business. "After three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers."³ He had never learned like the masters in Israel, yet He had more understanding than the ancients: and to us it is no surprising thing that those who listened to Him then and there, and always and everywhere, were filled with amazement and admiration; because He

¹ 1 John ii. 20.

² Isa. l. 4.

³ Luke ii. 46, 47.

was "unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument." ¹

Soon after He entered on His public mission He came to Nazareth, the town of bad repute, in which He was brought up ; and on the Sabbath day, as His custom was, He went into the synagogue, and stood up to read : " And there was delivered unto Him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor ; He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And He closed the book, and gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on Him. And He began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. And all bare Him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth." ²

Here the Preacher was at home, and in His own synagogue, where He had often worshipped. The congregation had known Him from His early childhood. They were all His friends and neighbors, and some of them were His kindred according to the flesh. They knew that He was a " carpenter's son," and a carpenter Himself. They had often been to the cottage

¹ Ezek. xxxiii. 32.

² Luke iv. 17-22.

where He resided, and to the little shop where He labored ; and He had doubtless worked for many of them, making ploughs and yokes for the farmers, and kneading-troughs for the women. He had also assisted in building and repairing some of their dwellings. The very synagogue in which they were assembled might have been, in part, the labor of His hands. And yet, in spite of the proverb, He seems to have had some honor in His own country and among His own people ; for He was welcome to their pulpit, and in their esteem they were "gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth."

About the same time He retired into a mountain with His disciples, followed as usual by a great multitude ; and, when He had taken a seat, the sweet speaker opened His mouth, and preached the sweetest sermon that ever fell from His lily-like lips. It begins beautifully and benignly with nothing but benedictions. "Blessed are the poor in spirit : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn : for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek : for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness : for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful : for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart : for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers : for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you

falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad : for great is your reward in heaven.”¹

What wonderful words are these, reversing, as they do, all our preconceived opinions concerning happiness ! We count those happy who are rich and prosperous, and always rejoicing ; but Jesus says, the poor in spirit, and they that mourn, and the persecuted, are the truly happy. And if, from the Mount of Blessing, He had only pronounced these nine benedictions, He would have done more for us than any other teacher ; for in each one of them there is a whole hive of honey.

But these “good words and comfortable words,”² are only the brief introduction to the splendid soul-filling and sublime sermon that follows ; and, though it seems impossible that the Grand Master should rise higher in His heavenly wisdom than the beatitudes with which He begins, yet He does rise higher. The great sermon grows greater all the while, and the sweet-smelling myrrh smells sweeter till the last drop falls from His lips, which are like lilies.

This is the remarkable discourse in which our Beloved gives us His own model prayer, which is so brief that it may be repeated in a few moments, and yet so comprehensive that it embosoms every temporal and spiritual blessing pertaining to this world and that which is to come, and withal so endearing to us because it is the first prayer in which we are taught to approach and address the Most High as “Our Father.” The children of men could never go

- ¹ Matt. v. 3-12.

² Zech. i. 13.

to the throne of grace with such boldness till this bundle of myrrh fell from the lips of our Lord Jesus, "When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven."¹ Glory be to the Son, who hath helped us thus to find our Father in our God!

This Sermon on the Mount embraces also the golden rule, as it is properly called: "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them," — a divine precept which has done more to elevate the race, and hasten the coming of the millennium, than all human means combined. The money of the treasury, the bayonet of the army, and the diplomacy of the statesman are not equal to it. With arms stronger than Samson's, it is pulling down the pillars of despotism everywhere. With a bow better than Achilles', and a surer aim than his, it is sending its sharp arrows into the heart of the King's enemies. And with blows heavier than the club of Hercules, it is busy bruising the old serpent's head. Before its blessed influence every valley shall be exalted, every hill shall be made low, and every mountain shall become a plain, and all the peoples of the earth shall become one family, "And they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."² Every man shall see in every other man his neighbor and his friend, and the grand Te Deum started eighteen hundred years ago by the angels above the plains of Bethlehem, shall be taken up by the universal brother-

¹ Luke xi. 2.

² Isa. ii. 4.

hood, and transmitted round and round the world "as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings,"¹ till it shall rise to heaven in a hurricane of praise: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men."²

And, in the whole history of literature, sacred and profane, where can you find any thing so sweet and precious as these beautiful words, and the heavenly balm they bring in their bosom to those who are anxiously saying, "What shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed?" "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"³

For the most part, the multitudes that listened to the Saviour's teachings were poor people and plain people. Now and then a Scribe or Pharisee, a rich man and a ruler, would mingle with the throng; but the majority of those who hung upon the Master's lips were publicans and sinners, farmers and fishermen, and such like. They were not men of learning, and

¹ Rev. xix. 6.

² Luke ii. 14.

³ Matt. vi. 26-30.

would hardly understand a didactic discourse ; and figures of speech would have confused them. And, knowing what was best adapted to their minds, the Good Master opened His mouth in simple parables, and used similitudes, so that they might easily apprehend and understand His meaning. The attention of the audience was arrested, at once, by an apt illustration or some interesting incident ; and just because He preached to them in their own common language, "the common people heard Him gladly."¹

Not unfrequently His bitterest enemies were surprised and overwhelmed by the unusual earnestness and eloquence of His words. On one most memorable occasion, when the officers of the law were sent to arrest Him, they chanced to come into His presence when He was preaching ; and they were so impressed with what He said, that they were unable and unwilling to execute their errand. They were so awed and captivated, by the commanding words of His mouth, that they did not venture to make the attempt to apprehend Him. They went of a set purpose to take Him into custody, by the express order and authority of the supreme court of the nation ; but the Saviour's earnestness and eloquence and unction had such a bewitching effect upon them, that they declined to execute the summons of the Sanhedrim. And when they returned without the prisoner, their disappointed masters said unto them : "Why have ye not brought Him ? The officers answered, Never man spake like this man."²

¹ Mark xii. 37.

² John vii. 45, 46.

When the time of His departure was at hand, and He was about to leave His friends and followers, He delivered to them one of the most timely and touching of all His addresses. They were in the guest chamber, the twelve apostles and Himself, and it was night. It was the same night in which He was betrayed. It was the last night of His sojourn amongst them. They were gathered round the supper table to keep their last passover, and their first holy communion. It was a doleful night indeed: the powers of darkness were mustering in the garden of Gethsemane for the last struggle. Jesus knew what was just before Him, for He had been always anticipating the dreadful hour which was now so near at hand. His heart was breaking, and He was beginning to be baptized with the long-looked-for baptism. And, perceiving that His companions were exceeding sorrowful as well as Himself, He commenced at once to comfort them. Speaking a word in season, He said, in language flowing with milk and honey: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know."¹

And, blessed be His glorious name for ever! Jesus is still "this same Jesus," — the same tender-hearted, loving, and affectionate friend. And His lips are still

¹ John xiv. 1-4.

like lilies dropping sweet-smelling myrrh. His words are "good words and comfortable words ;" ¹ and, when He speaks to the heart, they are so true and timely and tender ! " More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold : sweeter also than honey and the honey-comb." ²

He often sweetly whispers to us about the time of our espousals, reminding us of what we once were, and how much He loved us. " When I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live ; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live. I have caused thee to multiply as the bud of the field, and thou hast increased and waxen great, and thou art come to excellent ornaments : thy breasts are fashioned, and thine hair is grown, whereas thou wast naked and bare. Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love ; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness : yea, I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine. Then washed I thee with water : yea, I thoroughly washed away thy blood from thee, and I anointed thee with oil. I clothed thee also with broidered work, and shod thee with badgers' skin, and I girded thee about with fine linen, and I covered thee with silk. I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thy hands, and a chain on thy neck. And I put a jewel on thy forehead, and earrings in thine ears, and a beautiful crown

¹ Zech. i. 13.

² Ps. xix. 10.

upon thine head. Thus wast thou decked with gold and silver; and thy raiment was of fine linen, and silk, and brodered work; thou didst eat fine flour, and honey, and oil: and thou wast exceeding beautiful, and thou didst prosper into a kingdom. And thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty: for it was perfect through my comeliness, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord God.”¹

He is ever telling us, in words of unspeakable tenderness, how beautiful we are in His eyes, and how He delights in our loveliness. “Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves’ eyes within thy locks: thy hair is as a flock of goats, that appear from mount Gilead. Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn, which came up from the washing; whereof every one bear twins, and none is barren among them. Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech is comely: thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate within thy locks. Thy neck is like the tower of David builded for an armory, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men. Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies. Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense. Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee.”²

He is always calling us to come up higher in the divine life, and dwell with Him in the perpetual spring of perfect love and perfect peace. “My Be-

¹ Ezek. xvi. 6-14.

² Cant. iv. 1-7.

loved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone ; the flowers appear on the earth ; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land ; the fig-tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.”¹

But I forbear, because the whole Bible is a bundle of sweet-smelling myrrh, and it is all, in a certain proper sense, the word of Jesus : “ How sweet are thy words unto my taste ! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth ! ”² The precious promises are sweet, the precious doctrines are sweet. Even the precepts are precious and pleasant ; they are piercing and painful only to those who kick against them. “ The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart : the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold : sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned : and in keeping of them there is great reward. ”³ And if we might prize some portions of the sacred volume above the rest, we would set the most store by the Gospel and the epistles of John, just because they are the love-letters of Jesus.

Sitting in total darkness, and toiling at her humble task, a poor blind girl received the present of a Bible with raised letters, which has been such a blessing to those who cannot see with their eyes. With deepest

¹ Cant. ii. 10-13.

² Ps. cxix. 103.

³ Ps. xix. 8, 10, 11.

gratitude to her benefactor and great delight, this daughter of darkness began to pass her eager fingers along the sacred page, feeling after Jesus if haply she might find Him. But her hands had become so hard through hard work that there was not feeling enough in them to discern the slight indentations, and so she was left in as much darkness as ever. Again and again she tried to read the sweet story of the cross, but there was no use of trying.

But one day as she was sorrowfully and thoughtfully working as usual, it occurred to her that she might cut away the hard thick skin from her fingers, and then their touch would be delicate enough to spell out the words of life and light and love. So she took a sharp penknife, and, heedless of the pain, she pared away the hard thick skin from the ends of her fingers till she cut them to the quick; and as she passed her bleeding hand along the holy lines, hoping now to learn the sweet words of Jesus, she was doomed to another disappointment, for her fingers were so sore she could feel nothing but the pain, and, when they were healed, they were harder and more insensible than they were before.

Giving up all hope, she determined now to return the book to her friend that it might be given to some happier blind person, who would be able to pluck the fruit from its tree of life, and find healing in its holy leaves. And, holding the precious volume close to her beating heart, she kneeled down and prayed, saying: "Dear and blessed Jesus, who lovest the poor, and openest the eyes of the blind, I thank thee that

thou hast not hidden thyself from me. And since I cannot read thy healing words, I pray that thou wilt whisper them into my soul, that my spirit may not be dark like mine eyes. I can see with my heart, dear Jesus, and thou knowest that I love thee and thy Book." And, involuntarily suiting the action to the word, she lifted the open Bible to her lips and kissed it; and in a moment her countenance became as radiant as the rainbow, for her joy was unspeakable. To her soft lips the slightly raised letters were quite perceptible, and from that time forth, as she sat surrounded with gross darkness, a great light shined in and around her; and, as ever and again she pressed the holy gospel to her happy lips, she was heard saying, "Oh, is it not blessed to kiss the sweet words as I read them?"

My ever blessed Jesus: "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law. My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times. The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver. Thy testimonies have I taken as a heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart. Look upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name. Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee; and let thy judgments help me. I have gone astray like a lost sheep: seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments." ¹

¹ Ps. cxix. 18, 20, 72, 111, 132, 175, 176.

HIS HANDS.

CHAPTER IX.

"His hands are as gold rings set with the beryl."

THE same precious metal which was taken to represent the Saviour's head is also taken to represent His hands. And it is eminently fitting that it should be so, because the head and the hands are so intimately related to one another. The hands are the executive members of the body, the instruments with which the head works out its purposes. And our golden-headed Jesus is also our golden-handed Jesus. All His thoughts are precious, and all His acts are precious also. His acts, like our own, are only the expression of His thoughts. He is "wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working."¹ His wisdom is perfect, and His work is perfect. Doing only what He designed to do, from "before the foundation of the world," He does it exactly in the time appointed, and always so well that it could not be better done even by Himself.

The wisest human head will often make mistakes, and the most skilful human hands will sometimes spoil the most exquisite pattern; but there is a completeness about the Saviour's wisdom and work, to which nothing can be added, and from which nothing can be taken away. "The most fine gold"² cannot be

¹ Isa. xxviii. 29.

² Cant. v. 11.

rendered more pure ; and when fashioned into rings it forms the most perfect figures, and when precious stones are set in these they are often worn upon the hand and near the heart, and on the precious stones the names of dear friends are often graven.

Gold, jewels, and gems are some of the Scripture emblems of the saints, who are the Saviour's signets, and are sealed by His Spirit, and all their names are graven on the beryl of His unchanging love. As our great High-priest, He wears our names on His breast-plate, over against and on His heart perpetually, and also on the palms of His hands ; so that when we pray to Him, saying, "Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm,"¹ we may believe that we shall be heard and answered. Blessed Jesus, love me and uphold me. Let thy heart be over me, and thine hands under me continually. Forget me not, neither forsake me, and grant me grace that I may not forget thee nor forsake thee ; but that I may love thee more and serve thee better, and set thee as a seal upon mine heart, and as a seal upon mine arm.

And here it needs to be remarked that the Saviour never would have had any hands but for us. Before His birth in Bethlehem He had no bodily parts,² but for our sakes He became like ourselves. The great work of our salvation could be accomplished in no other way ; so the only-begotten and well-beloved Son

¹ Cant. viii. 6.

² Under the former dispensation, bodily parts were ascribed to Christ and assumed by Him that He might be better understood, and also in anticipation of the time when He would be "made like unto His brethren" (Heb. xi. 17).

of God came down from heaven, and assuming our nature He was "found in fashion as a man."¹ His hands were human hands, and very like our own; and as He was born poor for us, and had no earthly inheritance, He learned His father's trade, and actually supported Himself by daily labor, working with His hands. He was a King's Son and a King Himself, — yea, the very "King of kings,"² — yet He became a carpenter's son, and a carpenter Himself, and was not ashamed to labor at His lowly calling. Day after day, and year after year, the Lord of glory, in the disguise of a mechanic, was diligent in business in and around Nazareth, building barns and dwellings, and making ploughs and yokes, and bows and arrows, and such like things as belonged to His craft. And, as the neighbors passed Joseph's carpenter-shop, they often saw Jesus bending over the bench, while the drops of toil were bursting from His brow and shining brighter there than any royal diadem.

What a cutting rebuke His conduct was and is to those high-born, well-bred, and very genteel people, who are too proud or too indolent to labor, working with their hands. Are their hands better than the Saviour's? And is the servant above his Master? In these last days we are hearing much about the dignity of labor and the destiny of labor; but labor never was lifted from beneath the curse to such a lofty height, as when Christ, the Creator of all things, worked at the carpenter's trade.

But the time came when Jesus laid aside the com-

¹ Phil. ii. 8.

² Rev. xvii. 14.

pass, the square, and the level, the axe and the hammer and the iron tools, and left the lowly cottage and the little shop where He had lived and labored so long, and entered upon the great mission for which He was born into the world. At the age of thirty years He commenced the greatest work that was ever attempted, and after the lapse of a little more than three years He died on the cross, saying, "It is finished."¹ What He had to do was done, and it was well done. And though the task was often exceedingly painful, it was always performed with the greatest pleasure: "I delight to do thy will, O my God."²

This great work was the redemption of the race; and as Jesus toiled and prayed, and suffered and died, to remove the curse of sin, and bring in the blessings of His own salvation, His head and heart, and hands and feet, were all engaged in the glorious undertaking. Nevertheless, you must have noticed the particular mention that is made of His hands, and how frequently they are spoken of in the gospel. He went about doing good. He went about with His feet; but the doing, for the most part, was done with His hands. He was always doing, — doing with His might what His hands found to do; and, though He was often "wearied with His journey,"³ He was never "weary in well-doing."⁴ When He went out into the desert place to get quit of the thronging multitude, the crowd followed Him; and, as they had nothing to eat, He fed them with "five barley-loaves and two

¹ John xix. 30.

³ John iv. 6.

² Ps. xl. 8.

⁴ Gal. vi. 9.

small fishes.”¹ The scanty provisions of a lad, in passing through His wonder-working hands, grew big enough to make a banquet for more than five thousand people.

And when He healed the sick, how often we read that “He laid His hands on them” ! He “touched”² the leper and made him clean. When the deaf and dumb man was brought to Him, He “put His fingers into his ears, and touched his tongue, and straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain.”³ He went into the ruler’s house, and took his dear dead daughter “by the hand, and the maid arose.”⁴ When Peter’s mother-in-law was sick of a fever, “He came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up ; and immediately the fever left her.”⁵ And when Peter himself was sinking in the sea, “Jesus stretched forth His hand, and caught him.”⁶ Parents were everywhere bringing their children to Him, in spite of the displeasure of the disciples. “And He took them up in His arms, put His hands upon them, and blessed them.”⁷

In the garden of Gethsemane, when one of the apostles smote the high-priest’s servant, and cut off his ear, Jesus “touched his ear, and healed him.”⁸ And now and here let us turn aside, and see this great sight, — this greater sight than the burning bush. And what is it ? Why, it is Jesus, your Beloved and mine, coming up out of the city of Jerusalem, clasping

¹ John vi. 9.

³ Mark vii. 33.

⁵ Mark i. 31.

⁷ Mark x. 16.

² Matt. viii. 3.

⁴ Matt. ix. 25.

⁶ Matt. xiv. 31.

⁸ Luke xxii. 51.

with His hands the cross on His shoulder. And when, with the help of Simon, the Cyrenian, He reached the place of execution, the cruel soldiers of Cæsar took those hands that scattered blessings everywhere, and did nothing else but good, and nailed them to the accursed tree. But, though they were nailed to the cross, the Saviour's hands were not idle ; for then and there they were busy plucking a brand from the burning, and lifting up the everlasting gates for the poor penitent thief who went with Jesus that same day to paradise.

And ever since He went home to heaven our Redeemer has been making intercession for us. And the manner in which He presents His petitions is sure to render them successful. He is praying for us with His hands ; lifting them up before His Father's throne, as the most powerful and prevailing arguments that can be presented in our behalf. In the times when the old Roman Republic flourished, there was a good soldier who had done great things for his country. In the bloody wars through which he had passed, he suffered the loss of both his hands. He was a man greatly beloved for his distinguished services, and exercised much influence in the community. His brother, who was a soldier too, was put on trial before a court martial, for some grave offence ; and there was every prospect that he would be convicted and condemned, because the witnesses were bearing crushing evidence against him. But the prisoner's brother, who had lost his hands in fighting for the Republic, walked quietly into court while the trial

was in progress, and without saying one word he lifted up what was left of his arms to the judges, and those two empty sleeves with their silent prayers so touched the hearts of all that the prisoner was immediately acquitted. So Jesus, our best Brother, in making intercession for us, is lifting up both His hands before the heavenly court. He could speak for us as "never man spake,"¹ and present a most powerful plea as our "advocate;"² but His pierced hands are more eloquent than His golden mouth. As He lifts them up, the prints of the nails in their palms pour their speechless prayers into the Father's ear, and for the sake of what those hands have done and suffered mercy and grace are freely granted unto us.

But Jesus is here present with His people as well as in heaven. Because we cannot see Him in the body coming into our dwellings to dine with us, or when it is toward evening to tarry with us all night, because we do not see Him entering our sanctuary on the Sabbath to take the book from the minister, and read and explain the Scripture lesson, we are prone to think that He has left the earth altogether; but He has not left the earth, and He never will. "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."³ He is with us as truly as He ever was with the twelve, and with His kind hands He is ministering to our wants and wishes.

Every thing that we possess, our gold and silver, our bread to eat, and our raiment to put on, and all

¹ John vii. 46.

² 1 John ii. 1.

³ Matt. xxviii. 20.

those comforts and luxuries which make our sojourn here so pleasant, are the gifts of His hands. He bought them for us with His blood ; He brings them to us, bearing them in His hands ; He bestows them upon us. We may be so blinded by sin and sorrow that we cannot recognize His hands in the gifts of His good and gracious providence. Or we may be so worldly-minded, self-confident, and puffed up with empty pride, as to take the credit of these things to ourselves, saying, "My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth."¹ But whether we recognize it or not, whether we believe it or not, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above."² Industry, economy, integrity, and diligence in business, are excellent qualities, but of themselves they cannot secure the comforts of life. Something else is needed besides our own skill and resources. The blessing of our Beloved is indispensable to success. "For it is He that giveth thee power to get wealth."³ And this is true of sinners as well as saints. The blessings of Providence are never confined to Christians : "For He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."⁴ Nor are these blessings confined to the human race. Christ cares for oxen and sheep and ravens. Man of mercies, how condescending and how kind thou art ! Thou knowest "all the fowls of the mountains, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.

¹ Deut. viii. 17.² James i. 17.³ Deut. viii. 18.⁴ Matt. v. 45.

Thou preservest man and beast. The eyes of all wait upon thee : and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing. Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King, and my God.”¹

Moreover, our times are in the Saviour’s hands, — all our times, the “time to laugh” and the “time to mourn,” the “time to dance” and the “time to die.”² All our cloudy and dark days, and all our sunny and bright days, our times of sorrow and joy, adversity and prosperity, are in the dear hands of One who doeth all things well. Jesus knows better than we do what is best for us ; and with His own hand He mingles the bitter and the sweet of life. Sickness is often called a visitation of Providence, and some diseases are called a stroke. Among the Jews the leprosy was so called ; and how common it is for us to speak of paralysis as a stroke ! and apoplexy comes from a Greek word, which signifies to strike. But every stroke must come from some hand. And not only so, but every stroke must come from a hand reached hither out of heaven. When we are prostrated on a bed of languishing, we are laid there by the Saviour’s hand, and He His own self makes all our bed for us. All our “wearisome nights are appointed”³ by Him ; and whether sleeping or waking, whether living or dying, “His left hand is under my head, and His right hand doth embrace me.”⁴

- ¹ Ps. l. 11 ; viii. 8 ; xxxvi. 6 ; cxlv. 15, 16 ; lxxxiv. 3.

² Eccl. iii. 2.

³ Job vii. 3.

⁴ Cant. ii. 6.

He chooses all our changes, our ups and downs are ordered by His tender heart and executed by His gentle hand. He makes the lot crooked, and then He makes it straight. He brings us to Marah, and then to Elim. He sends the darkness down, and then the light to brighten it; the weeping cloud, and then the rainbow to crown it with glory.

With mercy and with judgment He weaves my web of life. I cannot always hear the music of His celestial loom, but I know that His hand is ever sending the shuttle hither and thither through the warp of my very being, filling it up with the dark and bright colors after the heavenly pattern, according to the good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself. "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"¹

And shall we not receive evil without murmuring, when we know for certain that it comes from the Saviour's hand,—and more especially when we know that it is sent to promote our present and future good? "For we know that our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."² The chastening rod that Jesus handles is like Aaron's rod that "budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds."³

"The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower."

And sweeter far will be the fruit. Bitter grief grows up into sweet grace, and sweet grace grows up into

¹ Job ii. 10.

² 2 Cor. iv. 17.

³ Num. xvii. 8.

sweeter glory, "while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."¹

"Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."² It is not to destroy the gold that the refiner melts it in the fire, but to make it more pure. It is not to spoil the precious stone that the cunning workman grinds it on his wheel, but to make it more precious. It is not to hurt the tree that the husbandman prunes it, but to make it more fruitful. And just because our Beloved would not have us to be barren and unfruitful, He comes "down into His garden" with the sharp trimming shears of sickness and sorrow, and cuts away the redundant foliage, that our fruit may be better and more abundant. "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit."³

Every sorrow is divinely sent and divinely brought, and when rightly improved it adds to us a new aspect of loveliness, making us more and more like Him whom sufferings made perfect. And when we are cut to the quick by some severe affliction; when we feel the blows of "much tribulation," and are tossing to and fro on the threshing floor, and up and down against the wind of adversity, — let us remember that the implements of our husbandry are in the hands of One who "doth not afflict willingly,"⁴ — never from

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 18.

■ John xv. 8.

² Heb. xii. 11.

■ Lam. iii. 33.

the heart, but only and always from the hand. "Whose fan is in His hand,"¹ whose flail is in His hand. And when these things are in His hands, and He is making bare His arms, and bending over us in their use, His heart is yearning over us with inexpressible tenderness.

Judgment is "His strange work,"² and it goes hard against the grain of His loving heart to resort to such rough measures to make us wiser and better. He would much rather only speak to us by the "still small voice"³ of His spirit, and the preaching of His gospel. But he must do more sometimes. He must smite as well as speak, to arrest our attention and bring us to Himself. When Absalom wanted to be reconciled to his offended father, he sent for Joab to come and act as mediator; but Joab paid no attention to the message of the prince. Then Absalom sent the second time for him, but the captain-general gave no better heed, and would not come. After this second refusal, the king's son said to his servants: "See, Joab's field is near mine, and he hath barley there; go and set it on fire. And Absalom's servants set the field on fire."⁴ And just as soon as Joab saw his barley burning he "arose, and came to Absalom unto his house." So, when the mild message of love fails to bring us to our Master, after repeated invitations have been received and rejected, Jesus sends some of His servants to set fire to our fields of grain, and some whom He loves most dearly must

¹ Matt. iii. 12.

² Isa. xxviii. 21.

³ 1 Kings xix. 12.

⁴ 2 Sam. xiv. 30.

needs be burned out of house and home before they will heed His gracious call. But, if by any means He brings us to Himself, we should rejoice and be exceeding glad, and glorify the Lord "in the fires"¹ by which we are brought unto Him and made more holy and more heavenly-minded. In such cases the end always sanctifies the means.

And when we are tempted to think that Jesus has forsaken us and forgotten us, let us call to mind these sweet words of His sweet mouth: "Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands."² He cannot forget and He will not forsake us. The final perseverance and eternal salvation of the saints are surer than the rising and the setting sun; surer than the seed-time and the harvest. The covenant of the cross is better every way than the covenant of the bow; and, though we may fall, we will not, nay, we cannot fall away, because, however far down we may descend, "underneath are the everlasting arms."³

Two Christian friends were once talking together about this blessed truth. The one said that he hoped to be saved because he had hold of Christ, and he thought that was a good reason for his hope. "Ah, but," said the other, "what would become of you if the devil should cut your hands off?" "What, then," asked the first, "is the foundation of your hope?" "My hope," said he, "is this, that Christ has hold of me, and Satan cannot cut His hands off." Of course this last was a better hope than the first, but when we have them both we may dismiss our fears for ever.

¹ Isa. xxiv. 15.

² Isa. xlix. 16.

³ Deut. xxxiii. 27.

My Jesus has laid hold of me, and I have laid hold of Him. I have laid hold of Him, because He has laid hold of me. I may let Him go, because I am weak; but He will never let me go, because He is strong. He may let me fall for my own good, but He will never let me fall away for His own glory; and to be "cast down" is not all the same as to be "cast off:" "For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day."¹ "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it."² Once and again the Good Shepherd proclaims this precious doctrine, saying in language that cannot be misunderstood: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."³

Believing these things, and trusting only and always and entirely in Him who is mighty to save, we may gather courage for all our conflicts "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places;"⁴ saying with him who was greater than the greatest of all soldiers, when he was "less than the least of all saints,"⁵ "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or

¹ 2 Tim. i. 12.

■ Eph. vi. 12.

■ Zech. iv. 9.

⁵ Eph. iii. 8.

■ John x. 27-29.

distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long ; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”¹

In all time of trial how sweetly comforting it is to know of a truth that the Saviour’s hand is in every thing that comes upon us, and that it does every thing that pertaineth to us and to our friends! It gives every blow, sunders every tie, nails every coffin, and digs every grave.

There are always many mourners in Zion ; and some of them, like Rachel, are refusing to be comforted because their children are not. In His kind providence it pleased the Lord to set you in a family. The “olive-plants”² that He gave to you were very pleasant, and your hearts were bound up in the little lilies that were committed to your care. You loved to tend and train them, and you watched their tender growth with great solicitude. But one after another they were all taken away. In your bed of spices there is no tender plant any more, and in all your “garden enclosed” there is not one lily left. How lonely seems your dwelling-place! Your home is empty now, your heart is empty also, and the whole

¹ Rom. viii. 35-39.

² Ps. cxxviii. 3.

world is empty too. The golden sky is gloomy, the brightest sunset seems "black as sackcloth of hair,"¹ and to your weeping eyes there is something like crape hanging down from the very door of heaven. But hush, Mary: there is a land where the rainbow never vanishes; there is one garden where the olive-plants never die; there is one home where the fairest flowers of the family never fade. To that better country, to that garden of glory, to that happiest home, your loved ones are all translated. They were taken thither by the hand of your dear Saviour and mine. "My Beloved is gone down into His garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies."²

In our present experience it is pleasant to feel the hands of Jesus as they hold us up, and help us on our heavenward way; and there is "strong consolation"³ in the thought that we are sustained and guided and guarded by the kind and mighty hands that we can only see by faith. But the time is coming when we shall see them in our flesh. These eyes shall see those hands when the throne shall be set,—

"Those heavenly hands that on the tree
Were nail'd, and torn, and bled for me."

And with them the Saviour shall separate many from one another, in that day, "as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left."⁴ The small and great, the living and the dead, shall all be

¹ Rev. vi. 12.

² Cant. vi. 2.

³ Heb. vi. 18.

⁴ Matt. xxv. 32.

gathered there in one mighty and miscellaneous multitude; and with the print of the nail in His right hand Jesus shall beckon some to come among His sheep: and with the print of the nail in His left hand He shall point others to go among the goats. "Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."¹ "Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."² "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."³

"GIVE EAR, O SHEPHERD OF ISRAEL, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubim, shine forth. Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh stir up thy strength, and come and save us. We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old. How thou didst drive out the heathen with thy hand, and plantest them; how thou didst afflict the people, and cast them out. For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them; but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favor unto them. Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved. Awake; why sleepest thou, O Lord? Arise, cast us not off for ever. O God, how long shall the adversary re-

¹ Matt. xxv. 34.

² Matt. xxv. 41.

³ Matt. xxv. 46.

proach? shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever? Why withdrawest thou thy hand, even thy right hand? pluck it out of thy bosom. For God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth. My times are in thy hand: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me. Make thy face to shine upon thy servant: save me for thy mercies' sake. Arise, O Lord; O God, lift up thine hand; forget not the humble. Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not. I have called upon thee, for thou wilt hear me, O God: incline thine ear unto me, and hear my speech. Show thy marvellous loving-kindness, O thou that savest by thy right hand them which put their trust in thee from those that rise up against them. Keep me as the apple of the eye; hide me under the shadow of thy wings. Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me: thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me. The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever: forsake not the works of thine own hands."

HIS HEART.

CHAPTER X.

"His belly is as bright ivory overlaid with sapphires."

THESE words were carefully chosen by the mind of the Holy Spirit, to reveal unto us, as far as possible, the gentle heart of Jesus. There was none so tender, so compassionate, so merciful, so kind, so loving, so long-suffering, and so full of sweetest sympathy as the Saviour. His great heart was always running over with pity for the poor, the sick, and the sorrowful; and, while He declined not to sit at meat with such distinguished people as the Scribes and Pharisees, He delighted to be the guest of publicans and sinners. "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them."¹

His compassion appears most prominent, perhaps, in the tender treatment of His friends. He loved His disciples dearly, though in many things they were so ignorant, inconsiderate, and uncongenial. They were constantly with their great Teacher, and they ought to have made better improvement of their golden opportunities, and greater progress in spiritual things. But they were dull of understanding, slow of heart to believe, and wonderfully worldly-minded. Yet, notwithstanding all, you must have noticed how mild, and mother-like, and sweetly patient Jesus was with

¹ Luke xv. 2.

them always. He held them up, and led them along step by step, as He "taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms."¹ He gave them "precept upon precept, precept upon precept ; line upon line, line upon line, here a little, and there a little ;"² speaking to them in parables, and often condescending to explain these simple illustrations, to bring them down to the comprehension of their minds. He was never provoked with their dulness ; nor could He ever find it in His great and gentle heart to blame them much for their slowness and lack of understanding.

And even when their conduct was personally distasteful and positively sinful, and they were ashamed of Jesus, Jesus was not ashamed of them, and never did He rebuke them with any bitterness. He knew their frequent infirmities, and was more than ready to forgive and excuse their most flagrant faults. When the ambitious mother of Zebedee's children requested that her two sons might have the highest places in the coming kingdom, "Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with ?"³

When these children themselves would have brought down fire from heaven, and consumed a whole village of Samaria because some of its inhabitants were not given to hospitality, Jesus mildly said to them : "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to

¹ Hos. xi. 3.

² Isa. xxviii. 10.

³ Matt. xx. 22.

save them.”¹ When there arose a reasoning among them by the way, and they disputed which of them should be greatest, taking a little child for His text, the Master preached them a sweet sermon on the grace of humility, teaching them and us that the last shall be first, and the least shall be greatest.

As the time of His departure was drawing near, He broke the sad tidings to His friends little by little; and when the cup of trembling and the cursed tree were just before Him, and He needed sympathy more than they, forgetful of Himself, He commenced, at once, to comfort them. When His own heart was breaking, He let it break; but He was careful to say to them, “Let not your heart be troubled.”²

He knew how badly some of them would behave, and that all of them would forsake Him the last night of His life upon earth; and yet, going into the upper room, and taking a basin of water, and girding Himself with a towel, He washed the feet of all the twelve. And when it became necessary to point out the traitor, it was done by an act of friendship, which should have melted the hardest of human hearts into which Satan had already entered: “And when He had dipped the sop, He gave it to Judas Iscariot.”³ Not long after that, when Peter denied Him three times with cursing and swearing, he was not sharply rebuked, as he deserved to be, but, on the contrary, was melted into tears by a glance of love: “The Lord turned, and looked upon Peter.”⁴

¹ Luke ix. 55.

² John xiii. 26.

³ John xiv. 1.

⁴ Luke xxii. 61.

The Saviour's merciful kindness was manifest, not only in what He said to His disciples, but also in what He did not say, as He told them at the supper table: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now."¹ The deep things of the kingdom, and the dark things which are hard to be understood, were purposely kept back from them, because they were as yet only babes in Christ, and not able to bear them.

And, after the resurrection, when Thomas heard that his Lord was risen from the dead, he declared that he would not believe it. It made no matter to him how many might testify to the wonderful fact, nor what kind of witnesses they were, he would not believe them. Nor would he believe the evidence of his own eyes even. He must prove the Saviour's personal identity by probing His wounds. "Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe."² And the next Sunday evening, when they met at the prayer-meeting, instead of reproaching him severely for his unbecoming conduct, Jesus meekly said to this dear though doubting disciple, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing."³

The same matchless kindness was manifested to those who were not His friends. He had a sympathy ready for the sorrows of those who had no sympathy

¹ John xvi. 12.

■ John xx. 25.

■ John xx. 27.

for Him. With a single exception, all His miracles were works of mercy, and most of them were blessings bestowed upon the sick, most of whom cared more to be cured than to be converted. "Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?"¹

He felt pity for the young man who came running to Him, and kneeling down in the dusty road so anxiously inquired after eternal life, and what good thing he should do to gain it. This rich young ruler was so honest, so earnest and open-hearted, so kind and gentle and good, that "Jesus beholding him loved him."² He was so lovely, Jesus could not help loving him; and when "he went away sorrowful,"³ very much of the Saviour's heart went with him.

When He entered into the temple, and saw the busy merchants there, His indignation culminated in "a scourge of small cords"⁴ only, with which He drove them all out of that holy place, the oxen and the sheep, and those who sold them. But even here His tenderness triumphed over every other emotion. He might have been more severe, and justly too, for they had made His Father's house a house of merchandise. But His loving-kindness was so great that He gently drove out the cattle: their owners could easily follow after, and care for them. He only overturned the tables of the money-changers: their gold and silver coins could quickly be gathered up again, and taken away. And when He came to the doves, He did not open their cages, nor untie their feet, lest

¹ Luke xvii. 17.

² Mark x. 21.

³ Matt. xix. 22.

⁴ John ii. 15.

they should fly away and be lost ; but He mildly said to those who sold them, "Take these things hence."¹ The kindness of His gentle heart would not permit Him to be more severe even when He was breaking up "a den of thieves."²

His divine and human compassion flowed forth in floods of feeling over those who had sinned away their day of grace, and were beyond the reach of help or hope. Only a few days before He died, He wept like a woman over the dear but doomed city of Jerusalem. Pressing through the gates, a great multitude went to meet Him. With smiling faces and shouts of joy, they hail Him as their long-expected King, and are ready now to conduct Him in triumph to the throne of David. It is a joyful sight to see them rending the branches from the trees, and casting them before the borrowed colt on which He rides ; and taking off their own garments also, and casting them in the way. And it is a joyful sound to hear them singing now, like the noise of many waters, "Hosanna to the Son of David : Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord : Hosanna in the highest."³

But, as they were rejoicing thus, Jesus was weeping all the time, and like "vinegar upon nitre,"⁴ so their songs of praise fell upon His heavy heart. He was turning the bend in the road on the brow of Olivet, where you get the best view of the beautiful city ; and as soon as He saw it His heart was touched into tenderness, and rivers of waters ran down His eyes

¹ John ii. 16.

² Mark xi. 17.

³ Matt. xxi. 9.

⁴ Prov. xxv. 20.

when He was looking at "the joy of the whole earth." ¹

Jesus was looking not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen ; and those things, not seen as yet, except by Himself, made His eyes a fountain of tears. He looked beyond the present moment, and in the near future He saw that same miscellaneous multitude surging in the streets round Pilate's judgment-hall, clamoring for His condemnation. In place of the palm branches, that are not withered yet, they are hunting for a hammer and nails, and a cross, and are hounding Him to the most ignominious death ; and instead of their pleasant "Hosanna in the highest," they are shouting themselves hoarse with such words as these : "We have no king but Cæsar ;" ² "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend ;" ³ "Not this man, but Barabbas ;" ⁴ "Away with Him, away with Him ;" ⁵ "Crucify Him, crucify Him ;" ⁶ "His blood be on us, and on our children." ⁷

Jesus looked into the remoter future, and saw that magnificent city spoiled. He saw the walls broken down by Roman battering-rams, and the Temple burning up, and beautiful Zion "ploughed as a field." ⁸ He saw thousands of the peculiar people perishing by famine and pestilence, and other thousands perishing by the sword, and other thousands "scattered and peeled" ⁹ over all the earth. Nay, more : He looked

¹ Ps. xlviii. 2.

² John xix. 15.

■ John xix. 12.

⁴ John xviii. 40.

⁵ John xix. 15.

⁶ Luke xxiii. 21.

⁷ Matt. xxvii. 25.

⁸ Mic. iii. 12.

⁹ Isa. xviii. 7.

beyond the life that now is, and saw many of them tormented in the flames of hell, with His blood on them according to their own awful imprecation ; and "condemned already,"¹ and beyond the reach of His almighty arm, and without hope, He could not help feeling sorry for them. "And when He was come near He beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace ! but now they are hid from thine eyes."²

And, strange as it may seem, Jesus was just as gentle to His personal enemies. When Judas came into the garden with his band, all armed, to arrest Him, He gave Himself up without gainsaying. But, blessed be His name, He was so magnanimous that He could not surrender Himself, without imploring that His friends might be permitted to escape. "I have told you that I am He. If therefore ye seek me, let these go their way."³

And during all that dreadful night and the next day, He manifested His compassion for those who were striving together to procure His crucifixion. There can be no question that Jesus deeply sympathized with Pilate, and felt pity for the unjust judge, who struggled so hard to release his innocent prisoner, but finally delivered Him up to His enemies, giving sentence that it "should be as they required."⁴ And at last when He was suspended on the cross, and His tide of life was ebbing slowly away, through

¹ John iii. 18.

² Luke xix. 41.

³ John xviii. 8.

⁴ Luke xxiii. 24.

His hands and feet, He saved the thief, who but a few moments before had joined his companion in taking up the taunts of the multitude, and casting the same in the Saviour's teeth. And, when He was dying He put one of His own precepts into practice, as He prayed for those bloody men who stripped Him and nailed Him to the tree, and smote Him and mocked Him and murdered Him: "Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do."¹

And, though gone now to God's right hand, whence He came, Jesus has lost nothing of His tenderness, and He never will. He is still "this same Jesus," and will be ever "touched with the feeling of our infirmities."² Though not a man of sorrows any more, He is a man of sympathies, and His human heart in heaven is tenderer than the dearest mother's, and in all our sufferings here it beats responsive to our own.

Man is born to trouble, and when he is born again he is born to trouble; so that whether he be an heir of hell or heaven, himself is a heritage of woe. But there is no trouble so great as that which may be called soul trouble. It comes in the very commencement of the Christian course. It is the fall that goes before the rising, the dark night out of which the day is born. But at first it seems to be a fall, from which there will be no rising; a black and dark night, from which the blessed day will never spring.

We are convinced of sin, and feel that we are "condemned already,"³ and that the wrath of God abideth

¹ Luke xxiii. 34.

² Heb. iv. 15.

³ John iii. 18.

on us. We are no longer hardened in unbelief, nor sleeping quietly in utter indifference concerning our future destiny. The Holy Spirit has broken with His hammer, and softened with His fire from heaven our hard and stony heart. Our blinded eyes are opened now to see ourselves just as we are, and we cannot look upon the dreadful sight. The great mountain of our fancied security vanishes like a dissolving view.

The exceeding sinfulness of sin is now revealed for the first time, and it appears abominable beyond all previous conception. Its guilt presses us down with a weight that yields not a moment's peace. Its pollution seems a stain too deep and damning to be washed away by a flood of penitential tears. Its curse is such a consuming fire within us that we are a hell unto ourselves. "A fire not blown shall consume him."¹ We are almost in despair, almost hopeless, and altogether helpless. Yet there is an irrepressible longing for relief. We weep and pray, and cry mightily to God for pardon and peace and purity, but there comes no answer from heaven. "A dreadful sound is in his ears."²

In the total darkness we are looking upward for the light, till our eyes fail; but no day dawns upon us, and "the eyelids of the morning"³ will not open to greet and gladden our weeping gaze. Earnestly desiring to be lifted out of the horrible pit, no deliverer passes that way. Slipping on the miry clay, we are feeling for some solid ground on which to stand, but we can find none. Turning to ourselves proves no

¹ Job xx. 26.

² Job xv. 21.

³ Job xli. 18.

better than the sinner turning to his sins for salvation. We leaned on our own strength, and found it nothing but weakness ; and learned by experience that righteous-self is no better than sinful-self, and that self-help and self-holiness cannot restore us to the divine image. All our righteousnesses are like the filthy rags of a beggar, and our best works can only whiten and beautify the outside of the sepulchre, which is "within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness." ¹

Yes, we tried to make ourselves better : with the soap and nitre of good works and alms-deeds, we tried hard and long to wash ourselves white, but there was no use of trying. All the soap and nitre in the world cannot wash away the blackness with which we were born. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" ² "If I wash myself with snow-water, and make my hands never so clean ; yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me. For He is not a man, as I am, that I should answer Him, and we should come together in judgment. Neither is there any days-man betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both." ³

Finding no help in ourselves, we next turn to our friends ; but, being sinners themselves, they cannot deliver us from the curse and the consequences of sin. Even though they were the holiest saints on earth, they could not rescue us from condemnation. They had pity for us, and prayed for us, and wept over us, saying, with Queen Esther in her distress : "How can I endure to see the evil that shall come

¹ Matt. xxiii. 27.

² Jer. xiii. 23.

³ Job ix. 30-33.

unto my people? or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?"¹ They might have prayed for us without ceasing, and wept sore day and night for our sake; but there is no salvation in prayers and tears. Even the Saviour's prayers could not calm the troubled soul, nor still the tempest in the mind of the awakened sinner; nor could the Saviour's tears wash away the smallest stain. Nothing but the blood of Jesus can atone for sin, and nobody but Jesus Himself can rescue us when we are ready to perish. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."²

But the soul often stops at this point, not daring to venture further. It was so with me. Before I had confidence to cast myself upon the kind and mighty arms of my only Redeemer, strange doubts and fears came into my mind; and in my own eyes I seemed scarcely worth saving. "What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?"³ Am I not too unworthy to be regarded by One so good? Am I not too insignificant to be noticed by One so great? Have I not sinned away my day of grace? Will the Saviour's heart melt, in the midst of His bowels, with mercy for me? And may not all my anxious feelings be the deceivings of Satan rather than the strivings of the Spirit? I am poor and miserable and worthless, and wicked exceedingly, and deserving only to be damned: will Jesus condescend to care for me? Oh, yes, He will! He did.

¹ Esth. viii. 6.

■ Acts iv. 12.

³ 2 Sam. ix. 8.

"I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord."¹

There are other troubles that are sent upon us, from time to time, to wean us from the world, and to make us wiser and better, more heavenly-minded and more holy. Lest we should settle down upon our lees like Moab, we are "emptied from vessel to vessel,"² and sometimes all our bottles are broken. We are not only chosen in the furnace, but we are often cast into it; not to burn us up, but only to burn up our sins. He, who chooses all our changes, might have spared us every grief, and taken us to the better country, without going through the Red Sea, and the long, rough, and roundabout way of the wilderness, and the river Jordan. But seeing the end from the beginning, for our present good and for our future glory, He leads us in His own "right way,"³ that we may go to a city of habitation. And as He Himself was made "perfect through sufferings,"⁴ so are all His saints; and "passing through the valley of Baca"⁵ is often better for us than sojourning in the land of Beulah. "Before I was afflicted I went astray."⁶

When a certain queen was sitting for her portrait, she commanded that it should be painted without

¹ Ps. xl. 1-3.

² Jer. xlviii. 11.

³ Ps. cvii. 7.

⁴ Heb. ii. 10.

⁵ Ps. lxxxiv. 6.

⁶ Ps. cxix. 67.

shadows. "Without shadows!" exclaimed the astonished artist. "I am afraid your Majesty is not acquainted with the laws of light. There can be no good portrait without shading." No more can there be a good Christian without sorrow. With nothing to try us, we could be nothing and do nothing, and know nothing of the most attractive graces that make us complete in Christ. Patience, experience, and hope, all grow from the seeds of grief. Every one of them is produced by sorrow. "Tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope."¹

Moreover, the greatest saints have been the greatest sufferers, and it was their sufferings that made them great. You have heard of "the patience of Job"² and the zeal of Paul, but you never would have heard of their patience and zeal, and perhaps not of themselves, if they had not been so severely tried. Their sore troubles lifted them up above their fellows, and made them what they were and what they are. And it will be always so. Those who suffer the most shall become the greatest and shine the brightest in their generation, and be remembered the longest when they are gone to the grave. As the blackest night brings out the brightest stars, and as the brightest rainbow is born of the blackest cloud, so the Saviour's burning and shining lights become all the more resplendent by reason of the clouds and darkness of sorrow by which they are so often surrounded. "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers

¹ Rom. v. 3.

² James v. 11.

temptations: knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”¹

As the stormy wind, in the spring season, opens the rosebuds into greater beauty and fragrance, so the sorrows of this life develop our Christian graces into the beauty of holiness and the smell of heaven. “Make haste, my Beloved, and be thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices.”²

It is a well-known fact that the stoutest pines are found in the stormiest regions of the earth, where the weather seldom clears and the boisterous winds blow without ceasing. The tempest toughens the trees as they are growing up, and when they are cut down they make the best timber. So the “trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord,”³ are strengthened by sorrow. The “stormy wind fulfilling His word”⁴ smites them often; and, after wrestling with the elements till they are grown up, they are better every way than if they had been nurtured only in the “garden enclosed,”⁵ and basking always beneath the sunshine of prosperity.

Besides, in their gracious influence, our sorrows reach beyond the grave, and prepare us for a more abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom, and a higher seat among the redeemed in heaven, where, as in the natural sky, “one star differeth from another star in glory.”⁶ After bearing the cross, comes wear-

¹ James i. 2-4.

² Cant. viii. 14.

³ Isa. lxi. 3.

⁴ Ps. cxlviii. 8.

⁵ Cant. iv. 12.

⁶ 1 Cor. xv. 41.

ing the crown. And the reigning will so eclipse the suffering that it shall scarcely be seen : "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." ¹

It is not to hurt his suffering patient, but to heal him, and make him healthy and happy, that the kind and skilful surgeon amputates his bruised and bleeding arm. And, when our "beloved Physician" ² is constrained to cut away any of our offending members, He tells us the reason of His conduct in these words : "It is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire." ³

You correct your child sometimes, not to spoil him, but lest he should be spoiled ; remembering the inspired proverb, "He that spareth his rod hateth his son, but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes." ⁴

In like manner your Beloved and mine deals with us. "For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth." ⁵ And never for His own pleasure doth He smite us, but always and only for our profit here and our promotion hereafter. "As many as I love I rebuke." ⁶

It is not to reduce their value that the refiner casts the precious metals into the crucible, but to make them pure and more precious because they are pure. And that we may be separated from every worldly substance, and purified from all iniquity, and minted into money that will pass current in God's exchange,

¹ Rom. viii. 18.

² Col. iv. 14.

³ Matt. xviii. 8.

⁴ Prov. xiii. 24.

⁵ Heb. xii. 6.

⁶ Rev. iii. 19.

or fashioned into vessels "meet for the Master's use,"¹ it is written of Jesus, "He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver."² And when the projection takes place, and all the dross of carnality is burned away from us, and His own image can be seen in us as in a glass, then we are sanctified wholly. "Wherefore glorify ye the Lord in the fires."³

It was not to burn the cedars of Lebanon that Solomon's workmen and Hiram's workmen cut them down, but to hew them, and carve them into door-posts and lintels, and such like things, for the temple in Jerusalem. It was not to destroy the great stones that they were dug up out of the quarry, but to shape them, and polish them into pillars and pinnacles, for that same great building, which was to be "exceeding magnificent, of fame and of glory throughout all countries."⁴

And it is not to do us any harm that tribulation and distress and persecution are sent upon us. These things are only the agents and implements of our sanctification. They are the "hewers in the mountains"⁵ and "the stone-squarers;"⁶ the masons and the carpenters, whom a greater than Solomon hath sent, to prepare us for the "house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."⁷ They are the axes and hammers and iron tools with which the goodly cedars are felled and smoothed, and the lively stones are dressed and polished into fitness for temple build-

¹ 2 Tim. ii. 21.

² Mal. iii. 3.

³ Isa. xxiv. 15.

⁴ 1 Chron. xxii. 5.

⁵ 1 Kings v. 15.

⁶ 1 Kings v. 18.

⁷ 2 Cor. v. 1.

ing. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"¹

They are the cunning, skilful workers in the precious metals, the goldsmiths whom the King of kings hath commissioned to make our crown of glory.

Like Bezaleel and Aholiab, they seem to be inspired with wisdom from above "to devise curious works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in the cutting of stones, to set them."² And just as soon as we are born again they begin their appointed task. They take the fine gold of our new life, which was tried in the fire of regeneration, and is seven times refined, and one after another, as opportunity offers, they polish and set in it the crown jewels of the kingdom of heaven. Or to change our metaphor, treating them as material instead of efficient causations, the pearls of sickness and adversity, the sapphires of temptation and sorrow, the rubies of tribulation and anguish, and even the darker stones found in "the valley of the shadow of death," and coming alive from the mines of the grave, may be said to construct for us a crown so dazzling with unspeakable brightness that it cannot be described. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."³

And while these things are making us pure and perfect, and preparing us for a greater recompense of reward in the coming kingdom, the Saviour's sweetest sympathy is manifested to us in the largest meas-

¹ Heb. i. 14.

■ Exod. xxxv. 32.

³ 2 Cor. iv. 17.

ure and in the loveliest manner. Judgment is His "strange work," and it goes hard against the grain of His loving heart to handle the rod. "He doth not afflict willingly,"¹ and His bowels of compassion are never moved for us so tenderly as when we are under the axe and the hammer. "He stayeth His rough wind in the day of the east wind."² And when we are in His own carpenter-shop, or in the spiritual cutting place of "the stone-squarers,"³ we should not murmur nor mourn even, but we should rejoice rather, because there we "shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel."⁴ The wise Master-builder knows better than we do what is best for us; and all His dealings with us are set on the square, as well as ourselves, so that the blows may be neither too heavy nor too many, but just sufficient to work out our perfect sanctification. And during the hewing and blasting, and cutting and chiselling, and sawing and planing, and sand-papering and polishing, His sweet and sympathizing voice is heard above the noise of the iron tools, saying, so seasonably: "O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted! behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colors, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones. And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children."⁵

In one of the most touching of the Scripture figures

¹ Lam. iii. 33.

² Isa. xxvii. 8.

■ 1 Kings v. 18.

⁴ Zech. iv. 10.

⁵ Isa. liv. 11, 12.

—the figure of a mother bird breaking up her nest, and teaching her fledgelings how to fly, and taking them upon her wings when they are weary and like to fall—Moses describes our Lord's tenderness with Israel, and not with Israel only, but with every one who is an Israelite indeed: "As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings; so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him."¹

There are other troubles, that are called temptations, by which we are constantly beset. They are not afflictions, because they are not divinely sent upon us. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man."² They come mainly through the apostate angel and his associates, and their design is to beguile us into sin. And, lest we should confound the works of God and the wiles of the devil, we would say here, that our tribulations are the flail and the fan of our heavenly husbandman, and their end is to make us better; but our temptations are the gins and snares of Satan, and their design is to make us worse.

We are not to blame for all our temptations, because we cannot hinder their coming, any more than the patriarch could hinder the birds from lighting down on his sacrifice; but we are to blame if we permit them to remain with us. "When the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away."³

¹ Deut. xxxii. 11.

² James i. 13.

³ Gen. xv. 11.

The worst of them can do us no harm, if they are manfully and prayerfully resisted with "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:"¹ on the contrary, they may be as productive of as much good as if they were so many means of grace. But the trouble is we are weak, and yield to them too easily, and fall under them too frequently, and almost before we are aware we have left our "first love,"² and are become lukewarm, and soon are going away after other lovers.

Nor is it strange that it should be so, because the devil is such an active, artful adversary, though he never seems to be an adversary at all. He is our worst enemy, but he professes to be our best friend. He is never what he seems to be, but always what he seems not. The cloven foot is carefully concealed; and though war is in his heart, and the poison of asps is under his tongue, his words are smoother than butter and sweeter than honey.

He is a most skilful fowler, and has as many snares as there are people in the world; and his quiver is full of the sharpest arrows, all dipped in the venom of damnation. He knows just when and where and how to set the net and draw the bow, and he seldom does either at a venture. He is so "wise to do evil"³ that he can quote Scripture like a minister, and he is such a consummate hypocrite that he often appears better than the best of saints: "For Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light." From the begin-

¹ Eph. vi. 17.

³ Jer. iv. 22.

² Rev ii. 4.

⁴ 2 Cor. xi. 14.

ning, his bad business has been to entice people to sin, and he has practised the black art of his profession so long that he has improved upon his original cunning and subtlety; and woe be to the man or woman who ventures upon his enchanted ground, and yields to his bewitching influence!

We are tempted in our bodies through our appetites and passions, and the constitutional sin that doth so easily beset us. Some "messenger of Satan"¹ is always on the alert to plant a thorn in our flesh. We are tempted in our spirits. Wicked thoughts and vain imaginings are crowding the mind, both when we wake and when we sleep; and the devil has much to do with our dreams. We are tempted in our duties. The evil one comes smiling to us, and saying, like a kind friend, Your work is too hard for your feeble frame. Spare yourself, and rest awhile from your "labors more abundant!"² Perhaps, indeed some other calling would be just as congenial as the ministry, and more conducive to health. We are tempted in our relations; and often those whom we most love, the members of our family, our kindred according to the flesh, are the angels of the devil, and would persuade us to eat the forbidden fruit, or to curse God and die.

And, stranger still, we are tempted in our devotions. The old serpent glides silently through the green pastures where the Good Shepherd makes us to lie down. Satan has a seat in every sanctuary, and every time we come to present ourselves before the Lord

¹ 2 Cor. xii. 7.

² 2 Cor. xi. 23.

he comes with us, to catch away that which is sown in our hearts. He was present at the first holy communion in the upper room in Jerusalem. He is present at every communion; and the doubts and fears and deep depression of mind with which we often come to the banqueting-house are, for the most part, his wicked devices to disturb our peace and destroy our comfort. There is nothing that he hates so much as the Lord's table; and, if he cannot hinder us from coming to the feast, he will come with us to hinder our enjoyment of it. If he were not such an invisible adversary, we might see his black form beside the minister, when he rises to distribute the elements, "standing at his right hand to resist him."¹ And when we come down from the holy mount, he will come with us, striving all the time to induce us to deny our dear Saviour, or to betray Him with a kiss.

And not unfrequently his evil communications are quite successful, and we fall from our steadfastness, and crucify "the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame."² And this comes to pass just because we do not guard against his first advances, and "abstain from all appearance of evil."³ He is not the ugly fiend he was represented to be, but a person of pleasant address and winning manners. We enter into conversation with him without gainsaying. We debate the doubtful question proposed, and in a little while we receive him as our welcome guest, and entertain him with lavish hospitality, vainly supposing that we are suffering no harm; and before we are aware

¹ Zech. iii. 1.² Heb. vi. 6.³ 1 Thess. v. 22.

we "are taken captive by him at his will,"¹ and the kingdom of hell is set up within us.

And now when we have gone so far astray, and broken our oath of allegiance to Jesus, will He not break His covenant of peace with us, and spurn us from His presence for ever? Oh, no! not so. The covenant of His peace was never made to be broken, and He will not cast us away. He is so merciful and gracious, and long-suffering and loving to the very last, in spite of ourselves, that He will not deal with us after our sins nor reward us according to our iniquities; and, from personal conflict with the prince of darkness, He knows how to pity us when we are confronted with his powerful fascinations. "For in that He Himself hath suffered, being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted."² And, blessed be His glorious name for ever, beneath the tenderness of His touch, and the gentleness of His handling, no bruised reed was ever broken or ever will be, as it is written of Him, "A bruised reed shall He not break."³

But, when we have forsaken Him, will He not forsake us? When we have left our first love, will He not leave His first love? No, never for ever. He is not altogether like one of ourselves, and we have the strongest possible assurance that He will never leave us, nor forsake us, nor forget us. "Thus saith the Lord; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown."⁴

¹ 2 Tim. ii. 26.

² Heb. ii. 18.

³ Isa. xlii. 3.

⁴ Jer. ii. 2.

We may go after other lovers, as we often do, and give our hearts to His great rival; but soon or late, with mercy or with judgment, He will bring us back to Himself: "Behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt. And it shall be at that day, saith the Lord, that thou shalt call me Ishi; and shalt call me no more Baali."¹

In the scriptures of the Old Testament, Ephraim is spoken of in terms of unmeasured condemnation, and the divine displeasure waxed hot against his contradictory character. "Ephraim is a cake not turned."² "The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle."³ "Ephraim also is like a silly dove without heart."⁴ "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away."⁵ "Ephraim compasseth me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit."⁶ "Ephraim feedeth on wind, and followeth after the east wind: he daily increaseth lies and desolation."⁷ "He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress. And Ephraim said, Yet I am become rich, I have found me out substance: in all my labors

¹ Hos. ii. 14-16.² Hos. vii. 8.³ Ps. lxxviii. 9.⁴ Hos. vii. 11.⁵ Hos. vi. 4.⁶ Hos. xi. 12.⁷ Hos. xii. 1.

they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin.”¹
 “Ephraim hath hired lovers.”² “And now they sin more and more, and have made them molten images of their silver, and idols according to their own understanding, all of it the work of the craftsmen: they say of them, Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves.”³
 “Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.”⁴

But, bad as he was, Ephraim was neither cast away, nor forsaken, nor let alone. The Lord, the dearest Love and constant lover, could not put him away: “He hateth putting away.”⁵ “How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man.”⁶

“I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus: Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth. Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord.”⁷

¹ Hos. xii. 7.² Hos. viii. 9.³ Hos. xiii. 2.⁴ Hos. iv. 17.⁵ Mal. ii. 16.⁶ Hos. xi. 8, 9.⁷ Jer. xxxi. 18-20.

If there was any difference between the children of Ephraim and the children of Israel, the last were worse than the first. And the children of Judah were not much better than their jealous brethren. The twelve tribes were equally yoked together in their wanderings from the right way. From the beginning, they were a stiff-necked, hard-hearted, rebellious, and ungrateful race. They murmured in Egypt, where they had some cause; they murmured more in the wilderness, where they had less; and they murmured most in Canaan, where they had none. They were always prone to idolatry, and often had other gods before the Lord. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the ten commandments, he saw them dancing and heard them singing round the golden calf which their own hands had made, and saying, "These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt."¹

After they were settled in Canaan, they made an idol of the brazen serpent that Moses lifted up in the wilderness, and "did burn incense to it."² They stoned the messengers of the Most High, and killed the prophets, and waxed worse and worse till the cup of their iniquity was full. And yet all this while the visible presence of the invisible One was with them. And when the glory departed it was not in haste to be gone. It waited long before it started on its heavenward journey; and when at last it left its resting-place above the mercy-seat it did not fly away swiftly on the wings of the wind. It went away by

¹ Exod. xxxii. 4.² 2 Kings xviii. 4.

little and little, and slowly, as grief always goes ; and there were several distinct stages in its departure.

It went first only as far as "to the threshold of the house,"¹ and there it tarried ; but, as there were none to sigh and to cry after it to return, it resumed its homeward journey, and rested next "at the door of the east gate of the Lord's house,"² and there it tarried, as on the threshold, and for the same purpose. But, as the people did not implore it to return, it rose and started on the third stage of its journey, and rested again "upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city,"³ and in plain sight of all the inhabitants thereof ; and there is a tradition among the Jews that it remained in this last position for a whole year, waiting to be gracious and willing to return, but as there were none to say, "Abide with us,"⁴ it finally vanished from their view. By going away so gradually, the glory intimated that it went away reluctantly.

"Loath to depart bids oft farewell."

But is the glory clean gone from Israel never to return? Has God forgotten the covenant that He made with Abraham, and renewed to Isaac with an oath, and confirmed to Jacob for a law? Not so. The peculiar people are peculiar still, and still preserved ; and they shall be gathered home again "out of all countries,"⁵ and "from the four corners of the earth."⁶ And the glory—their glory and the glory of the Gentiles—shall return again and remain with

¹ Ezek. ix. 3.

² Ezek. x. 19.

³ Ezek. xi. 23.

⁴ Luke xxiv. 29.

⁵ Jer. xxiii. 3.

⁶ Isa. xi. 12.

them for ever. It shall return not slowly, as it went away, but swiftly. "For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west ; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be."¹ "And His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east."² "And the glory of the Lord came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east. So the spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court ; and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house."³ Henceforth Jerusalem shall be the metropolis, and the Jews the masters and the missionaries, of the world. "For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."⁴ "And the name of the city from that day shall be, The Lord is there."⁵

But there are other sorrows that we bring upon ourselves, and for the most part we are the makers of our own misery. We ought to have a care lest we put too much upon the devil, and give him more than his due. He is bad enough, and busy enough, and blameworthy enough ; but we have often thought that our own selves are sometimes more to blame than he is. The apostle James tells us plainly, that "every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed."⁶ If only we could blame Satan or somebody else for our sorrows, they would not be so hard to bear ; but the tormenting thought is this, — we brought them on ourselves, and ourselves only are responsible for them.

¹ Matt. xxiv. 27.² Zech. xiv. 4.³ Ezek. xliii. 4.⁴ Isa. ii. 3.⁵ Ezek. xlviii. 35.⁶ James i. 14.

It was some excuse for Adam when he could say, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat."¹ And it was some excuse for the woman when she could say, "The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat."² And the sentence pronounced upon the man was not so severe as the sentence pronounced upon the woman, because he was not so much to blame for the great transgression. But there are some troubles for which we cannot blame one another. We often run into temptation, and meet the devil more than half way. "Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird,"³ but seeing the snare we walk straight into it. Through ignorance or neglect of duty, or downright cowardice, we get into many difficulties that might have been avoided, if only we had been more circumspect.

And there is no cup so bitter as that which we wring out with our own hands for our own lips to drink. There are no thorns so sharp and piercing as those which we plant in our own path and in our own pillow. And our own rod hits us oftener and hurts us more than any other. As an eagle is sometimes wounded by an arrow feathered from its own wing, so many a poor sufferer cannot deny that his own sins fledged the fiery darts that pierced him through and brought him bleeding to the dust. As Acteon was hunted down and devoured by his own dogs, so many a man is destroyed by his own doings. The divine threatening is surer than the heavens and the earth: "Thine own

¹ Gen. iii. 12.² Gen. iii. 13.³ Prov. i. 17.

wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee.”¹

Moses was a good man, and a faithful servant of the Most High. To his everlasting praise be it spoken, he “refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter ; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season ; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt.”² To his personal and powerful instrumentality the peculiar people were indebted for their deliverance from bondage, and for forty years he was their leader and law-giver in the wilderness. And it seems sad beyond expression that he was not permitted to cross the Jordan with them, and enter the land of Canaan, that happy land that had been the home of his heart for more than half a hundred years. But he shut himself out from the promised land. He lost his temper at Meribah, and disobeyed the divine behest. Instead of only speaking to the rock as he had been bidden, he smote it, — “he smote the rock twice.”³ And though the waters gushed out all the same as if he had only done as he was directed, his unbelieving behavior was counted bad enough to exclude him from the holy land. “Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring

¹ Jer. ii. 19.

² Heb. xi. 24.

³ Num. xx. 11. It should be remembered that this same rock had been smitten once, about thirty-eight years before ; and, in smiting it again and again contrary to the divine command, Moses marred a significant type of that Saviour who was “once offered to bear the sins of many.” Heb. ix. 28.

this congregation into the land which I have given them.”¹

When Jacob resided with his father and mother, he was a happy man, and had a happy home. Isaac and Rebekah were doubtless proud of their twin children, and fondly hoped that they might long be spared to them, to rock the cradle of their declining age. The children were different in their appearance and disposition and pursuits; but both of them were greatly beloved, and it went well with them both. But as Jacob was his mother's favorite he probably fared better than Esau. “The boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob.”²

But, in an evil day, Jacob took undue advantage of his elder brother, in the matter of the birthright, and obtained the blessing by fraud. No modern confidence game was ever half so mean and unmanly. From first to last the younger brother pursued a crooked policy to gain what did not belong to him. He could not have been more than fifteen years of age when, taking advantage of Esau's necessity, he bought the birthright for a mess of pottage. And when his father was old and blind, and about to die, and his brother was gone a hunting for venison to make him savory meat before he blessed him, Jacob went and killed a kid, and after his mother had prepared it he took it to his father, with the hands of Esau, and by lying and downright

¹ Num. xx. 12.

² Gen. xxv. 27.

blasphemy he obtained the blessing. But he obtained a curse also. From that moment he was miserable, and all his life long he was suffering the penalty of that one great transgression. He was obliged to quit his home at once, and never saw his mother afterwards. And ever and again his sin was coming back upon him to torment him. And, lest he should not see the connection between his crime and its consequences, he was often sinned against in the same way that he sinned. His own father-in-law deceived him as he deceived his father. And when he waked up the next morning after his marriage and saw the blear-eyed Leah by his side, instead of the beautiful Rachel whom he loved, he must have remembered, with stinging sorrow, that dark day, and the darker deed, when he substituted himself, the younger son, for the elder ; and when his wicked children came home with Joseph's coat of many colors once, but now all red with blood, and saying with their lying lips, "This have we found : know now whether it be thy son's coat or no,"¹ they were paying him back in his own coin another instalment of the wages of his wickedness.

But the Lord was so loving that His tenderest mercies were mingled with the judgments that these great and good men brought upon themselves. He had too much grace invested in them to let them perish in their sins, and they were not cast away like "reprobate silver."² They were followed with good as well as evil ; and the good was set over against the evil to balance it, as the light is set over against the darkness to make it bright.

¹ Gen. xxxvii. 32.

² Jer. vi. 30.

When he was flying from his father's house and the face of Esau, at the end of the very first day's journey, Jacob came to Bethel, where, as he slept, he saw a ladder resting at his side and reaching into heaven, and the angels "ascending and descending on it,"¹ and the Lord standing above it, and speaking down to him kind words of good cheer and great encouragement. Then he came to Haran, where he found a home among his kindred, and his beloved Rachel for an helpmeet, and great temporal prosperity in spite of his father-in-law's selfishness. And when he was returning to his own country with "two bands" he came to Mizpah, where Laban's anger was turned into love, and where he parted with his son-in-law praying, "The Lord watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another."² And as he went on his journey he came to Mahanaim, where "the angels of God met him,"³ and encamped round about him to protect him on every side, and from every danger. And, going a little further, he pitched at Peniel, where he wrestled with God, and proved an overmatch for the Almighty; and where he met with a change of heart and a change of name; and where, instead of coming and killing him, Esau came "and kissed him."⁴ And, last of all, he came to Goshen, where he spent his last and best days, and where his gray hairs went down, not with sorrow, but with glory, to the grave: "By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff."⁵

¹ Gen. xxviii. 12.² Gen. xxxi. 49.³ Gen. xxxii. 1.⁴ Gen. xxxiii. 4.⁵ Heb. xi. 21.

And as for Moses, although he was not permitted to enter the land of Canaan, from the top of Pisgah he saw it all. "The Lord showed him all the land of Gilead, unto Dan, and all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim, and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah, unto the utmost sea, and the south, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm-trees, unto Zoar."¹ He doubtless saw more of the promised land than those who went in to possess it. His eye was not dim, but the range of its vision must have been greatly enlarged to see the whole country: "The Lord showed him all the land."

Moses was a prophet, and he may have seen more than the natural landscape, as it stretched away before the natural eye. He may have seen those wonderful things not come as yet,—even the Great Prophet predicted by himself and like unto himself, going through the country on His mission of mercy, binding up the broken-hearted, giving "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."² And when His work was done he may have looked upon Him with His cross climbing the hill of Calvary, "that goodly mountain."

And when he had taken this last and best view of the Holy Land Moses closed his eyes and breathed his life out in the presence of his Lord. He had no wearisome nights, no tossings to and fro, no wasting sickness. What a mercy! His natural force was not abated, and without any suffering or the least struggle he fell asleep in the arms of the Almighty, and was

¹ Deut. xxxiv. 1-3.

² Isa. lxi. 3.

buried by no other hands than those that made him. And when all was over the Prince of Angels seems to have been put on guard at the unknown grave to watch and defend its precious treasure ; for we read in the book of Jude about Michael the archangel contending with the devil when "he disputed about the body of Moses."¹ And about fifteen hundred years after his sublime death and splendid burial he appears on the "high mountain apart,"² so that after so long a time he actually entered Canaan, and saw Jesus when He was transfigured. "Behold, there talked with Him two men, which were Moses and Elias, who appeared in glory."³ And last of all, and most wonderful of all, when we go to heaven, there, with all the redeemed, we shall sing "the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb."⁴

"Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering ; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another."⁵ So live that you will be missed and mourned when you die. That was a beautiful spectacle at what they supposed would be the funeral of Dorcas, when all the widows stood by Peter "weeping, and showing the coats and garments"⁶ which she had made while she was with them. Those garments had a tongue, and pronounced a more touching tribute to this "great woman"⁷ than any eloquent eulogy that the apostle could have spoken. And we

¹ Jude 9.

² Matt. xvii. 1.

³ Luke ix. 30.

⁴ Rev. xv. 3.

⁵ Col. iii. 12.

⁶ Acts ix. 39.

⁷ 2 Kings iv. 8.

scarcely wonder that she was raised again from the dead, and presented alive to the saints and widows, because her good works and alms-deeds were so many that she could be scarcely spared. Go, thou, and do likewise. Go, thou, and do better, if it be possible. There are widows still in the world, and orphans; sick people and poor people and children of neglect and crime. They are wild flowers now, it may be, and trodden under foot by the wayside; but some of them are destined for Paradise, and if you care for them they will reward your kindness by blossoming in your goodly heritage here, and shedding their sweetest fragrance for you hereafter and for ever in heaven. Let your tenderest sympathy be enlisted, and be instant in season and out of season in striving to relieve the sorrows of those who are in any suffering. "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." ¹

Then when the last pulse is quivering at the wrist, and the last beat is halting in your heart, looking back on a life well spent in the service of loving charity, you can, dying, say, with one of old time: "When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me: because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness,

¹ James i. 27.

and it clothed me : my judgment was as a robe and a diadem. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor : and the cause which I knew not I searched out." ¹

And, better still, in the day of disclosures, when the books shall be opened, and you shall stand before the judgment seat, Jesus shall recognize and reward your merciful kindnesses as if they had been done to Himself personally : "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." ²

Jesus my God my glory, "Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense ; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice." ³ Hear thou in heaven the beating of my heart, and hide not thine ear at my breathing. "Oh that thou wouldst bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast." ⁴ Bless me with the blows of thine hand, and make them as sweet to me as the kisses of thy mouth. Bless me indeed, with the furnace and the fire and the file ; with the axe and the hammer and the iron tools ; with the plough and the spade and the harrow and the hook and the flail and the fan ; with "the wicked which are thy sword," and men which are thy hand, O Lord, and with "the messenger of Satan to buffet me ;" ⁵ only make thy grace sufficient for me. And all the while that I am suffering here, let thine eyes and thine heart be over me for good ; and when thou hast "tried me I shall come forth as gold," ⁶ and give thee all the glory.

¹ Job xxix. 11-16.

² Matt. xxv. 40.

³ Ps. cxli. 2.

⁴ 1 Chron. iv. 10.

⁵ 2 Cor. xii. 7.

⁶ Job xxiii. 10.

HIS LEGS.

CHAPTER XI.

"His legs are as pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold."

PILLARS of any kind ought to be strong and enduring, because they are intended for support ; and the most part of the building in which they are placed must needs rest upon them. And for this reason the materials of which they are made should be selected with the greatest care. If they are to be constructed of wood, the toughest timber that can be obtained ought to be used. But if neither "the oaks of Bashan" nor "the cedars of Lebanon" are counted good enough, then the pillars must be made of stone, and the best of stone is always in demand for such purposes. And from the beginning until now pillars made of marble have been the most enduring and the most beautiful. Among the mouldering ruins of ancient cities there are pillars of marble still standing that were set up before the Saviour was born ; and some of them will, doubtless, remain in much of their original strength and beauty till the cry shall be heard at midnight, saying, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh ; go ye out to meet him." ¹

But no pillars of wood, or stone, or iron, or any thing else, are half so strong and abiding as the legs of our Beloved Jesus. He is able, therefore, to hold us up

¹ Matt. xxv. 6.

in all our weaknesses, to help us in all our ways, and to carry any burden that may be laid upon us, and ourselves as well. "O Lord God of hosts, who is a strong Lord like unto thee? or to thy faithfulness round about thee?"¹

Sin is a burden, and it presses with more or less heaviness upon the hearts of all men everywhere, because all men everywhere are sinners. To most people it seems a light and trifling thing. And, because they do not see it as it is, they do not feel it as they ought. But when they are convinced of sin, when they are brought to see its exceeding sinfulness, then they begin to feel its exceeding heaviness. It scarcely seemed a burden before, but now it is a burden that can scarcely be borne: "I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died."²

On the first page of the illustrated copy of the "Pilgrim's Progress" you see the picture of "a man clothed with rags standing in a certain place; with his face from his own house, a book in his hand, and a great burden upon his back." That man is the principal character in the book, and is introduced to us in the first paragraph. His progress as a pilgrim has not commenced yet, for he does not know which way to go. As he appears to us, he is the image of the awakened sinner; and the great burden beneath which his back is like to break is the image of his sin.

It was the word of God that suggested this expres-

¹ Ps. lxxxix. 8.

² Rom. vii. 9.

sive picture to the immortal dreamer, and it was the word of God that revealed to the man his true condition ; for the book in his hand is the Bible, and as he read therein "he wept and trembled." Before he saw that blessed volume, and himself in it, as in a glass, he had no knowledge of sin, and the burden on his back seemed so little and light that he could hardly see it or feel it ; but now he not only sees it and feels it, but he fears it will sink him "lower than the grave."

That picture is a portrait, and the life-like likeness of every anxious inquirer. Bunyan was his own pilgrim, and described his own progress and the progress of every pilgrim ; and for this reason the man with the bundle on his back was named Christian, because he represents so aptly all those who are on their journey to the celestial city.

Such is our dreadful condition. We are all burden-bearers ; we are sin-bearers. And this biggest of all the burdens which we have laid upon ourselves is greater than we can bear ; but yet we cannot lay it aside. Do what we may, we cannot get quit of it. Like the man in the woods, on whom the lurking panther has leaped from the tree, we are bestrid by a monster that is lapping our life's blood, and whose clutch will not relax beneath our feeble blows. This burden belongs to us. It was born with us, and it is a part of our very selves : "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity ; and in sin did my mother conceive me." ¹

The man after God's own heart was not so good that he did not feel it. Nay, David felt it always ; and

¹ Ps. li. 5.

there were times when he was so pressed down into the dust by its overwhelming weight that he could carry the crushing load no longer. "Mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me."¹ The patriarch Job, the perfect man, felt it; and it drained every drop of sweetness out of his cup, and leaving nothing but bitterness behind he became a burden to himself. "I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men? why hast thou set me as a mark against thee, so that I am a burden to myself?"² And Paul, who "was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles,"³ felt it more keenly, perhaps, than any of the saints; and in his own weighty words he describes it as a body of death: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"⁴

This peculiar expression, by which the great apostle would describe the burden of sin, is one of unusual strength. It is, perhaps, the very strongest in the New Testament, and no other combination of words could express the sense of sin so well. That corrupt and corrupting thing, the curse of sin, was on him and in him and all around him; and he could not deliver himself from its perpetual presence and polluting power.

In the former time when tyrants reigned, their sentence of death was sometimes executed by binding a dead body to the living body of the criminal, and

¹ Ps. xxxviii. 4.

² Job vii. 20.

³ 2 Cor. xi. 5.

⁴ Rom. vii. 24.

compelling him to carry about the loathsome load until it killed him. And this body of death, bringing death, is the best image of sin. It clings to us so closely that we cannot separate ourselves from it. When we go abroad for pleasure, it goes with us to torment us ; when we lie down to sleep, it lies down with us to keep us waking all the night, and when we rise in the morning it rises also.

But must we die beneath this burden of death ? Is there no relief, no way of escape, no deliverer ? Is there no answer to the apostle's agonizing question, and our own also, " Who shall deliver me ? " Yes, there is. Jesus shall deliver. He is our sin-bearer, and by suffering the penalty pronounced against the sinner He has relieved us from that penalty : " Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away ¹ the sin of the world ! " ² With His own hands He lifted the load from our shoulders and laid it on His own : " Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree. " ³ The curse of sin was resting on us, but He became a curse for us. " He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities ; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him ; and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray ; we have turned every one to his own way ; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. " ⁴ " For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin ; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. " ⁵

¹ ἀἵρων, beareth away.

² John i. 29.

³ 1 Pet. ii. 24.

⁴ Isa. liii. 5, 6.

⁵ 2 Cor. v. 21.

This greatest truth of the two Testaments, under the former dispensation, was set forth with becoming solemnity, on the great day of atonement, by the two goats that were presented before the Lord at the door of the tabernacle. One of these goats was slain by Aaron as a sin-offering "for the people,"¹ as well as for himself and for his household ; and its blood was sprinkled on the mercy-seat and before the mercy-seat. Upon the head of the other goat the high-priest laid his hands and confessed the sins of the congregation, "putting them upon the head of the goat,"² which was then led away into the wilderness.

Both goats were intended to represent the Saviour. So great was the work He had to do when He was made unto us "wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption," that types had to be doubled and multiplied to present any thing like a fitting representation. The goat that was slain for a sin-offering represents Jesus as dying to satisfy the divine justice, and so to procure our justification "through faith in His name."³ The scapegoat, laden with the sins of the people, represents Him as ever living to carry on and complete the good work already commenced, and separate us from all sin, and so to procure our sanctification: "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us."⁴ Besides, the goat that was slain was substituted for the one that was not slain, and both were necessary to prefigure Him who was our substitute.

¹ Lev. xvi. 15.

² Lev. xvi. 21.

³ Acts iii. 16.

⁴ Ps. ciii. 12.

and His perfect work. The twain that are one in the precious truths which they teach seem very like the blood and water that flowed from the Saviour's broken heart, when it was pierced, to be of sin "the double cure."

Poverty is a burden. It is a burden that presses heavily upon many of our fellow-men. And it is sometimes so galling and so grievous to be borne that the strongest fall down under it, and are glad when death comes to relieve them of the load they could carry no longer.

It is true some of the poets have sung about the pleasures of poverty ; but these sweet singers were, doubtless, rich themselves, and surrounded with all the comforts and luxuries of life, and that delightful suffering to which their harps were tuned was far from them, and "distance lends enchantment to the view."

Had they been nearer by, and better acquainted with life among the lowly, or had they ever suffered hunger, with nothing in the house to satisfy it, and no money to go to market, they would have written their verses, if at all, for the minor key in music ; and their long measure would have swung slowly and sadly to the moaning of the melancholy sea, or the wailing of the desert wind.

From personal experience and abundant observation, thousands of competent witnesses can testify that there is no pleasure in poverty. To live in ■ dark, damp cellar where the pure air never penetrates, or in the top story of a dilapidated and overcrowded tenement, through whose leaky roof you can count

the stars by night when the rain is not descending; to have only scanty summer clothing for the cold winter season; to send the children to Sunday school with naked feet when the ground is frozen; to have nothing but the plainest kind of fare morning, noon, and night, and never enough to appease the appetite, and sometimes to have none at all, and go hungry to bed; to feel a quenchless thirst for knowledge, and have neither money to buy books nor any time to read them; to be shut out of the sanctuary because you cannot pay the pew-rent to the rulers in Israel who are taking toll from those who travel the free highway to heaven; to see the dear wife of your youth wasting away with a "pining sickness,"¹ without either meat or medicine,—to think that she might be saved from death, and spared for years to come, but unable to get the best advice and the necessary means; and, when at last she melts from your embrace, to be dependent upon the cold charity of the world for a coffin, and to see the desire of your eyes and the idol of your heart buried in the potter's field,—surely, there is neither poetry nor pleasure in such poverty as this.

But, in spite of such poverty as this, there may be such poetry and pleasure as all the wealth of the world can neither give nor take away. The riches of poverty are "the unsearchable riches of Christ,"² and "the exceeding riches of His grace,"³ and Christ Himself, who is better worth than all the world. By a painful personal experience, that lasted as long as He lived upon earth, Jesus knows just how you feel, and just

¹ Isa. xxxviii. 12.

² Eph. iii. 8.

³ Eph. ii. 7.

how to feel for you. None of His people were ever so poor as Himself, — no, not one. He was so poor that He had no house to be born in, no home to dwell in, no bed to die in, and no grave to be buried in. In this great world, which He made, and which He came to save, He was a poor way-faring man without a local habitation or a place to lodge that He could call His own, and every living thing of all flesh was better provided for than Himself: “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head.”¹

One evening during one of the annual feasts, after He had been preaching to the people and teaching in the Temple, the Evangelist tells us that when “every man went unto his own house Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives.”² He went to the Mount of Olives because He had no house to go to. He was so very poor that, during the whole period of His public life, He went about almost, if not altogether, a beggar, and the maid-servants who followed him “ministered unto Him of their substance.”³

But Jesus was not always so poor. He had seen better days. But was He not born poor? Yes; but His birth was not His beginning, and His better days were before He was born. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”⁴ He sat on an eternal throne, and possessed all perfections in Himself; and when He created the angels and the worlds, with all their

¹ Matt. viii. 20.

³ Luke viii. 3.

■ John vii. 53; viii. 1.

⁴ John i. 1.

wealth of glory and of beauty, they were all His own. But, blessed be His name, He became poor for our sakes. Of His own free-will He "made Himself of no reputation,"¹ that He might make us princes in His everlasting kingdom: "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich."²

The religion that He brings to us is the real riches, and renders us independent of outward circumstances, and where His love is shed abroad there may be poverty without, but there will be peace within. Himself alone is the greatest possession. He is more than all the acres of the earth, and better than all the gold and silver of its mines. And, if He is ours and we are His, we shall be rich in poverty, and just as happy without a fortune as with one. "What are you doing?" said a minister to a poor old man, as he entered his windy little hut, and saw him sitting there in the corner of a smoky room and beneath the dripping rafters, with the Bible open on his knee, and the snow drifting through the broken window. "What are you doing to-day?" "Oh, sir," said he, "I am sitting down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit is sweet to my taste."

Besides, in every emergency the wants of the Lord's people shall be well supplied. During a great commercial crisis, when many of the richest men were the poorest, hoping to speak a word in season, I preached a sermon on the text, "My God shall supply all your

¹ Phil. ii. 7.

² 2 Cor. viii. 9.

need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”¹ As I descended from the pulpit, one of the elders joined me, and as we walked from the house of God in company he went on to say, “My dear brother, your text is very precious : it begins with my God and it ends with Christ Jesus, and from the beginning to the end it is a message from heaven unto me. For some time past I have been very much embarrassed in business and depressed in spirits. My obligations are coming due at the bank, some of them to-morrow ; and I have no money to meet them, and I may have to fail. I slept none last night, and, coming to church this morning, I could not help thinking if I had a father as rich as the Patroon he would help me ; but I have learned to-day that I have a Father and a Brother in heaven richer than Mr. Van Rensselaer. I will go to them.” And, as he went through the panic without failing, he did not go to them in vain. “Delight thyself also in the Lord ; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord ; trust also in Him ; and He shall bring it to pass.”²

And those who have no business and are very poor may expect much more of the royal favors of our King. It was not the rich merchant's barrels of meal and baths of oil that the Lord blessed, but the poor widow's “handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse.”³ These scanty stores were blessed so abundantly that they sustained the widow and her son and Elijah for more than two years, when no rain fell from heaven and there was a great scarcity of food in all the land.

¹ Phil. iv. 19.² Ps. xxxvii. 4, 5.³ 1 Kings xvii. 12.

The saints have a surer promise than the seed-time and harvest. "They shall not be ashamed in the evil time; and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied."¹ They shall be more than satisfied, they shall be girded with gladness, and "glory in tribulation," and shout aloud and sing in the blasted summer: "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."²

And though they should never prosper in temporal things, it may be better for them every way, because prosperity is often the worst form of adversity. It makes good men bad, and bad men worse, and wise men fools. "Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked."³

But, if they shall never have enough and to spare, they shall always have enough. "The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing."⁴ The blessing now, as in the days of old, is not on the banks, nor on the barns, but on the basket. "Blessed shall be thy basket."⁵ And with this daily benediction "our friend Lazarus" shall fare as well as "Solomon in all his glory." "He that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack."⁶

When Elijah dwelt by the brook in the wilderness, "the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the

¹ Ps. xxxvii. 19.

² Hab. iii. 17, 18.

³ Deut. xxxii. 15.

⁴ Ps. xxxiv. 10.

⁵ Deut. xxviii. 5.

⁶ Exod. xvi. 18.

morning, and bread and flesh in the evening.”¹ And when our dear Lord Himself and His servant Peter were so poor that they could not pay their temple tax, Peter was sent a-fishing, and the first fish that came up on his hook brought the needful money in “his mouth.”² And, if there was no other way to supply you with the meat and the money that you need, I believe that the fowls of the air and the fish of the sea would become angels again, and bring them to you. “Trust in the Lord, and do good ; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.”³ “I have been young, and now am old ; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.”⁴

Reproach is a burden. In the word of God our enemies are likened to wild beasts, bees, birds of prey, creeping things, and other unclean animals. The “roaring lion” leaps upon us from his lair, or from some solitary place where he was lying in wait to attack us unawares ; “strong bulls” rush against us in their rage to toss us on their horns, and trample us under their hoofs ; the hungry “ravening wolves” of evening come howling round us as soon as the day of prosperity begins to darken into the night of adversity. Our persecutors are “swifter than the eagles” of the heaven ; they pursue us upon the mountains ; they compass us about “like bees,” embracing every opportunity to sting us ; they are a “generation of vipers,” a flock of vultures, and a pack of bloodhounds.

The Bible is a very plain book, and calls men and

¹ 1 Kings xvii. 6.

² Matt. xvii. 27.

■ Ps. xxxvii. 3.

■ Ps. xxxvii. 25.

things by their right names. And, when it says that some of our adversaries are like lions, it would teach us that they are high and mighty, a right royal race, and gifted with many noble qualities for which we cannot help respecting them; when it speaks of some as bulls, it suggests the strength with which they push against us for our hurt; when it calls others ravening wolves, it teaches the hungry greed with which they would devour us; the eagles are the image of the swiftness with which others pounce down upon us to strike their claws into our quivering flesh; bees are by far the best to prefigure those little busy-bodies and tale-bearers who are flying everywhere, stinging as they go; vipers are those snake-like natures that come crawling against us on the ground and in the grass, striking us from behind, and seldom higher than the heel; the vultures represent those cannibal kind of creatures who have no greater pleasure than to feast upon human character in its highest development of "a man in Christ;"¹ while the dogs are taken to shadow forth those low, mean, spaniel-hearted, little cur-like "lewd fellows of the baser sort,"² who are always barking at everybody, because it is so natural for them to bark.

All these are powers for evil, and they are doing as much harm as they can. It is their chief end to do us harm. But the meanest and the wickedest is this last, which deserves not to be spoken of by any better name than "the power of the dog."³ To be run at; to be barked at; to be bitten by dead dogs in the shape

¹ 2 Cor. xii. 2.

² Acts xvii. 5.

³ Ps. xxii. 20.

of living men,—this is one of the most common of all our annoyances. David felt it long ago,—he felt it keenly. Shimei alone was equal to a whole kennel. A nobler nature, though an enemy, would have had compassion on the king in his misfortune; but his currish spirit rejoiced to snarl and show his teeth against his most gracious sovereign, when Absalom snatched at the crown, and the kingdom was shaken. Dog-like, he fell upon his royal master when he was down. And one of David's attendants was so provoked that he asked permission to despatch him on the spot. "Then said Abishai the son of Zeruiah unto the king, Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head."¹

This breed of dogs is found in all the earth, and has existed in every age, and they are unclean animals all. The apostle tells us to beware of them: "Beware of dogs, beware of evil-workers;"² but it is quite impossible to avoid them, or to get quit of them. To run from them makes them bolder to run after us, and they are so swift of foot that we are soon overtaken. To kick at them is worse than kicking "against the pricks."³ And to take them by the ears is like putting our hands between their teeth.

And the agonizing question, What shall we do? is often asked by those who are suffering from this miserable and most malignant power. What shall we do? as they are hunted down like the panting stag, and held at bay. Clearly, the less they do the better.

¹ 2 Sam. xvi. 9.² Phil. iii. 2.³ Acts ix. 5.

"Their strength is to sit still."¹ Silence under suffering is the best condition ; and prayer to the Master, entreating Him to muzzle the brute, or call him off, is all that we can do to any purpose, as we learn from His own example. All these wild and unclean beasts were set upon our Beloved ; but when He was reviled He reviled not again, and when dying He was dumb.

In the twenty-second psalm, speaking in the name of Jesus, David tells us the story of Jesus in these words : "Many bulls have compassed me : strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint ; my heart is like wax : it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd ; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws ; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me : the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me : they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones : they look and stare upon me. They parted my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture. But be not thou far from me, O Lord : O my strength, haste thee to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword, my darling from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth : for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns."²

As soon as Jesus was born in Bethlehem He was hunted out of his own country by Herod, the king, who "sought the young child's life."³ And when He

¹ Isa. xxx. 7.

² Ps. xxii. 12-21.

³ Matt. ii. 20.

was brought back from Egypt, and grew up to manhood, and presented Himself to His own countrymen, as their long-expected Messiah, they could see no beauty in Him. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not."¹ And, stranger still, the Saviour's friends and kindred, — the members of His own immediate family, those who gathered round the same family table, and slept under the same family roof, — the brothers and sisters of our Lord, did not believe in Him, and really thought that He was a lunatic; and on one occasion "they went out to lay hold on Him: for they said, He is beside Himself."²

Immediately after His baptism in the Jordan He was led away into the wilderness, and tempted of the devil. When He preached His first sermon in Nazareth where He was brought up, many of His neighbors "were filled with wrath, and rose up, and thrust Him out of the city, and led Him unto the brow of the hill, whereon their city was built, that they might cast Him down headlong."³

By the Scribes and Pharisees He was sadly misunderstood, and His pure motives were misconstrued. Because He came with a smiling face like "sweet flowers," and went to the house of feasting, they called Him "a gluttonous man, and a wine-bibber."⁴ His good was evil spoken of; for they said, "He casteth out devils through Beelzebub, the chief of the devils."⁵ Often they took counsel against Him, and sought to kill Him. And because He healed the sick on the

¹ John i. 11.² Mark iii. 21.

■ Luke iv. 28, 29.

■ Luke vii. 34.

⁵ Luke xi. 15.

Sabbath day they took up stones to stone Him. Wherever He went during the whole period of His public life, these wicked men and devils dogged His track, and never ceased their persecutions till they hounded Him to the dreadful death of the cross.

The dreadful death of the cross, we have said. We should rather say, the dreadful death on the cross, because it was not the cross that killed "the Lord of glory." The torturing tree had not time to do its work. Jesus died of a broken heart literally and truly. The lingering death by the cross was anticipated and shortened by His soul burden, which was greater than He could bear; and He was slain by the contempt that was heaped upon Him, and the cruel treatment He received: "Reproach hath broken my heart."¹

And, when we are reviled and spoken against and persecuted, we know that Jesus has learned by experience how to feel for us, and how to help us. And it will be no small degree of comfort just to call to mind the fact that our Beloved travelled the same path, though more thorny than our own; and at every step we take in this sorrowful way it is something just to see the prints of His feet. "For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin."²

Neither should we forget the last and best of His nine benedictions: "Blessed are ye when men shall

¹ Ps. lxix. 20.

² Heb. xii. 3.

revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.”¹ David would not permit Shimei to be slain, and he was even looking forward to the time when his cursing would blossom into a blessing: “It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day.”² Men do not gather grapes of thorns nor figs of thistles, but Jesus does. And, when “the Lord turned the captivity of Job,”³ He doubled his former prosperity and gave him “twice as much as he had before,” and his adversaries were ashamed. “When a man’s ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.”⁴

Sickness is a burden. It may be called a universal burden; for soon or late, in a greater or less degree, it must be borne by every son and daughter of our race. And, strange as it may seem, the Saviour’s most devoted friends are not exempt from any of the numerous ills to which flesh is heir; and the message of Mary and her sister Martha is often sent to the mercy-seat, “Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.”⁵

To be engaged in active business, buying, selling, and getting gain, or to be engaged always about our Father’s business, — to be a minister of the gospel at home, or a missionary among the heathen, — and to be laid aside in the prime of life, how hard it is to bear the burden of disappointment mingled with pain, even

¹ Matt. v. 11.² 2 Sam. xvi. 12.

■ Job xlii. 10.

⁴ Prov. xvi. 7.⁵ John xi. 3.

for a little while! Unaccustomed to the yoke, we fret and vex ourselves, and return again to the coveted post of duty before the time, because we cannot be idle.

But we are soon sent back to our retreat, in spite of ourselves, to rest and recover our health, if it be possible. And when, at last and slowly, the dreadful truth dawns upon the mind that a restoration may not be possible, how hard it is to entertain the painful peradventure! If the thought of dying is only suggested in the kindest way, and by those whom we most love, it is not welcome, and immediately we change the conversation, and call to mind these precious words of Scripture, "To him that is joined to all the living there is hope."¹

But finally the awful truth must be received, and the day comes when we cannot help thinking that our illness may result in the taking down of our tabernacle. The best of skill is baffled, and all the recommended remedies have failed to do us any permanent good. The deep-seated disease will not let go its grasp, and, in spite of all attempts to dislodge and drive it away, it abides with us; never ceasing to make us worse and worse, preying upon our mind and body both; stealing the brilliancy from our eyes, sapping the blood from our veins, the marrow from our bones, and turning our moisture "into the drought of summer."²

While the days are bright and the air is bracing, we drive out till the effort becomes too much for our

¹ Eccl. ix. 4.

² Ps. xxxii. 4.

weakened strength. Or we take a short walk with slow steps and unsteady, leaning on the top of a staff until we can walk no more. "And the grasshopper shall be a burden."¹

For a while kind friends carry us to the table morning, noon, and night, but even this exertion becomes too much for us to endure; and we are compelled to remain in the sick-chamber, where we can only lie down, and rise up, and look out of the window, and watch the clock on the mantel, "as a servant earnestly desireth the shadow."²

As the long and tiresome days, and longer and more tiresome nights go slowly by, we are brought so low that the pleasant light of the sun is painful to our eyes, and the windows are darkened. The noise of wheels is so distressing to the nerves that sand or sawdust must be sprinkled on the stony street. And the day of all the week the best is dreaded most, because of the startling sound of the church-going bell. The kindly neighbors often send us flowers; but their fragrance is so sickening that we cannot keep them in the room, and the sweetest honey is bitter to our taste. Once it was our dearest joy to receive our friends, and their cheerful presence helped to lighten our load, and shorten our service of suffering; but now they may not come any more, and those who wait upon us must needs walk softly, and never speak above their breath.

"So am I made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed to me. When I lie

¹ Eccl. xii. 5.

² Job vii. 2.

down, I say, When shall I arise, and the night be gone? and I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day. When I say, My bed shall comfort me, my couch shall ease my complaint; then thou scarest me with dreams, and terrifiest me through visions: so that my soul chooseth strangling, and death rather than my life. I loathe it; I would not live alway: let me alone; for my days are vanity.”¹

But, when this burden of broken health is laid upon us, Jesus helps us to bear it. Though He was never sick, and could not be, because He “knew no sin,” yet there is a certain proper Scripture sense in which “Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.”² He took them to the cross, and bore them there. He takes them now, and bears them still, by sympathizing with us, and making His grace sufficient for us.

As soon as the first bad symptom makes its appearance the Saviour comes to see us. When His friend was laid upon a bed of languishing in Bethany, and the sisters sent Him word, He did not hasten to that darkened home. For wise purposes He waited till the loved one died and was buried. But He never waits any more. He comes with the disease; for sickness is one of the chariots in which He drives down from heaven to visit those whom He hath betrothed to Himself for ever; and when He alights in the sick-room, and walks so quietly to our bedside, the music of the golden harps is not half so charming as the beautiful goings of His blessed feet, and no voice is

¹ Job vii. 3, 4, 13-16.

² Matt. viii. 17.

so soft and gentle and cheering as "the voice of my Beloved."¹

His delightful presence brightens the darkened chamber. The light of His countenance is clearer than the clearest sunshine, causing the plain, bare walls to sparkle like the jasper walls of the New Jerusalem, making the place seem more like a little heaven, for "the Lamb is the light thereof."² His garments scented with "myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces,"³ dispel the smell of medicine, and the atmosphere becomes balmy as the breath of angels. And when rightly viewed the distressing cough, the faltering step, and the labored breathing are the love tokens that our Beloved brings to us, like the "ear-ring and bracelets," and "jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment,"⁴ that Isaac sent to Rebekah, that so we may be "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."⁵

Nowhere else than in the sick-room do we experience so much of the Saviour's loving-kindness. His divine and human sympathy are lavished in His mild and mother-like manner of ministering to our necessities. He is the best watch in the wearisome nights, and we sleep better when His left hand is under our head, "for so He giveth His beloved sleep,"⁶ and we feel more secure when His right hand doth embrace us: "They shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods."⁷ "Even as a nurse cher-

¹ Cant. ii. 8.

² Rev. xxi. 23.

³ Ps. xiv. 8.

⁴ Gen. xxiv. 53.

⁵ Rev. xxi. 2.

⁶ Ps. cxxvii. 2.

⁷ Ezek. xxxiv. 25.

isheth her children,"¹ so Jesus cherisheth us, and His strength is made perfect in our weakness. "Deborah, Rebekah's nurse,"² was not so devoted to her mistress, and Jochebed, the mother of Moses, was not so careful of her "goodly child,"³ as Jesus is of those who are His. Nay, more, the most blessed among women, Mary the mother of our Lord, was not so tender of her "Holy Child" as her "Holy Child" was of her,—and not of her only, but of all those also who were given to Him in the covenant.

A woman may forget ; and, overcome with fatigue, the divinest mother may fall asleep at the cradle of her suffering child. But Jesus never forgets. Jesus never sleeps. "He that keepeth thee will not slumber."⁴ And in our weakness He loves to have us look to Him, and lean on Him. Recently, in the east country, one of our female missionaries was in feeble health, and much depressed in spirits. Of a warm Sunday afternoon she went to the chapel as usual ; for she loved the house of God and the preaching of the Gospel. She was sitting alone on a mat spread on the earthen floor, longing for support and rest, and feeling unable to maintain her trying position until the close of worship. Presently she felt something at her back, and looking round she saw a friend seated behind her, and heard the whisper, "Lean on me." Scarcely yielding to the kind request, she heard it repeated, "Lean on me." Then she divided her weight with the gentle pleader, but that did not

¹ 1 Thess. ii. 7.

³ Exod. ii. 2.

² Gen. xxxv. 8.

⁴ Ps. cxxi. 3.

suffice. And in earnest, almost reproachful tones that same voice was heard again, saying, "If you love me, lean hard." So Jesus says to us, and to every one of us in particular: "If you love me, lean hard." And the harder we lean, the better He likes it. And the beautiful spectacle excites the admiration of angels and strangers: "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?"¹

One morning I received a letter from a friend, saying that there was a sick stranger in the hospital who would like to see me; and in a little while I was at the side of his narrow snow-white bed. As I took his hot hand in mine, I expressed much pleasure at seeing him in such a comfortable place where he would have the best advice and the best of care. Immediately the big tears began to run down his burning cheeks, as he said in broken accents: "Yes, every thing is very comfortable here, but then it is so hard to be so sick, so far from home, and among strangers; and oh, how much I miss my mother now!" I told him that he had thousands of brothers and sisters in the city, and that Christ was better than the best mother in the world, and could do more for him. And when I had prayed with him I rose up and went away, leaving him, where I found him, alone with Jesus.

"Alone with Jesus! O how sweet
In health to worship at His feet!
But sweeter far, when day by day
We droop and pine and waste away,
To feel His arms around us close,
And in His bosom find repose.

¹ Cant. viii. 5.

Alone with Jesus ! how secure !
Vile in myself, in Him how pure ;
The tempests howl, the waters beat,
They harm me not in my retreat ;
Night deepens 'mid its gloom and chill,
He draws me nearer to Him still.

Alone with Jesus ! what alarms
The infant in its mother's arms !
Before me death and judgment rise,
I turn my head, and close my eyes ;
There is naught for me to fear or do,
I know that He will bear me through."

And here we are bold to say that, when sickness comes upon us, it would be better for us, every way, if we would look to Jesus, and lean on Jesus for help and healing. The members of the medical profession are men of humanity, and ought to be esteemed "very highly in love for their work's sake ;"¹ and they are often indispensable to the recovery of their patients, because they are the appointed means for accomplishing the divine purposes, like the sailors in the storm of whom it was said, "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved."² But yet, after all, it is not their skill nor their resources that brings the expected end ; but it is the Lord alone, who blesses their treatment, and underneath the secondary causes of their prescriptions there is "the hiding of His power."³

Jesus is the best physician. He knoweth our frame better than the wisest men, for He made it. He is never mistaken in His diagnosis of the most obscure

¹ 1 Thess. v. 13.

² Acts xxvii. 31.

³ Hab. iii. 4.

disease, and He can heal without the use of means as well as with them. He is "the beloved Physician,"¹ and will answer any call at any hour of the night. When He was here in the body, "whithersoever He entered, into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought Him that they might touch, if it were but the border of His garment: and as many as touched Him were made whole."²

The oldest and most inveterate cases were not beyond His ability. He healed "all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease."³ Lepers were cleansed by His command, and maniacs were restored to their right minds. He raised up those who were at the point of death, and gave good health to the poor woman who "had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse."⁴ There was healing in the touch of His hand, there was healing in "the hem of His garment,"⁵ there was healing in the word of His mouth: "Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed."⁶ And after He went home to heaven His apostles healed the sick in the name of Jesus. "Rise up and walk,"⁷ were omnipotent words, when uttered by human lips, in the name of Jesus. And when they were used in that same prevailing name there was healing virtue in Paul's "handkerchiefs, or aprons,"⁸ and in "the shadow

¹ Col. iv. 14.² Mark vi. 56.

■ Matt. iv. 23.

■ Mark v. 26.

⁵ Matt. ix. 20.

■ Matt. viii. 8.

⁷ Acts iii. 6.⁸ Acts xix. 12.

of Peter passing by.”¹ And shall there be less power in prayer to “this same Jesus,” who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think?

In a remarkable letter doubting, if not denying, the efficacy of prayer when offered for the recovery of the sick, after making a certain proposition to test its actual value in such cases, a recent writer says: “I might have proposed to treat two sides of the same hospital, managed by the same men; one side to be the object of special prayer, the other to be exempted from all prayer. It would have been the most rigidly logical and philosophical method.” Now, so far as such an experiment could be properly made, we think it has been made; and it so happens that we have in the scriptures of the Old Testament “an imperishable record” of the result.

There we read about two men who belonged to the highest rank in life, and sat one after the other on the same high throne, and ruled over the same great nation. Speaking after the manner of men, they were equal in wealth and influence, and occupied the same position; for they were the third and thirteenth kings of Judah. Both of them were taken sick. The name of the first was Asa. In the thirty-ninth year of his reign a disease appeared in his feet, and waxed worse and worse until it was exceeding great: “Yet in his disease he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians.”² Perhaps his Majesty was something of a natural philosopher, and believed that it would be useless to pray for his restoration, because all diseases

¹ Acts v. 15.

² 2 Chron. xvi. 12.

are governed by immutable natural laws. Indeed, he may have been so much delighted with the study of these laws as to forget that there must be a lawgiver. And whether is greater, the law or the lawgiver, and Lord of the law, — “the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?”¹ But, whatever might have been his opinions, the inspired word tells us that “he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians.” And the very next verse gives the result of their prayerless treatment in these words: “And Asa slept with his fathers, and died in the one and fortieth year of his reign.”² The best and most celebrated physicians were in attendance upon their sovereign day and night without ceasing for more than two years, and yet their royal patient died.

The name of the other man was Hezekiah, and when he was taken sick his disease was worse than that of Asa, for he was “sick unto death.” He was desperately sick from the beginning, and beyond the reach of all medicine. His malady was mortal, and he knew it; for he received this message from heaven concerning the matter: “Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live.”³ And, to make the test still more rigidly logical and philosophical, he summoned no physicians to his bedside. He simply prayed, and wept sore with his face turned to the wall, and looking unto Jesus. “And it came to pass, afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of the Lord came to him, saying, Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the Lord,

¹ Matt. xxiii. 17. ² 2 Chron. xvi. 13. ³ 2 Kings xx. 1.

the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears : behold, I will heal thee : on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the Lord." ¹ We do not believe that the plaster of figs, prescribed by the prophet, had any thing to do with the king's speedy and complete recovery. And, if it had, it could in no wise have given him a second lease of his earthly house for the set time of "fifteen years."

And besides this "imperishable record of the real power of prayer" to heal the sick, and the real power of physicians without prayer, we have these inspired words for our infallible guide when we or our friends are prostrated on a bed of languishing : "Is any sick among you ? let him call for the elders of the church ; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up ; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him." ² This exceeding great and precious promise has been tried and proved times without number, and many living witnesses, who, when they were sick, were raised up in answer to prayer, might be called to testify that it is true. I have myself seen it proved, and proved it myself more than once. When the best of skill was baffled, and I was requested to tell the patient that there was no more hope, I have turned to this sure word of promise, and read it, and pleaded it at the mercy-seat, and having seen the answer coming so soon and so unexpected to many I cannot help believing it. I do believe it. I believe it

¹ 2 Kings xx. 4, 5.

² James v. 14, 15.

with all my heart ; and "I am not mad, most noble Festus." ³

Bereavement is a burden. And, of the many that are laid upon us, it is often the heaviest, the hardest, and the most heart-breaking. To love so tenderly and so truly, and then to see the desire of our eyes vanishing away ; to receive the last soft pressure of the hand, and the parting kiss ; to look through our tears at the pale face that will smile on us no more ; to sit down together at the family table so long, and then to sit down over against an empty chair where a golden head used to rise ; to go to the cemetery and bury a living heart in the loved one's grave, — this is sorrow like unto which there is no sorrow ; and we do not wonder that there is much mourning when the dear home is darkened with the shadow of death. Often the hard and stony heart is melted into tears, and the new heart of flesh is poured out like water, when the fondly cherished idols of the household are taken hence.

I have seen the husband bending over the coffin of his beloved wife, holding it fast in his embracing arms, and almost refusing to let it go to the grave ; I have seen the mother, tearless and terrible in her grief, springing from her seat at the funeral, and seizing the casket that contained the jewel of her little child, and struggling to retain it in the home it made so bright and happy ; I have seen the daughter fainting away at the burial of her father, so that the service could not be finished ; I have seen the widow kneeling on

¹ Acts xxvi. 25.

her knees beside her husband's grave, and, like one distracted, calling upon him to come away home with her, making the graveyard more gloomy by reason of the greatness of her grief, — and in all such pining sorrow there is positive sin. If we were heathen people, and had been brought up in pagan darkness, such sore lamentations would not seem strange. But, having a hope, we sorrow often as those who have none.

To those who are not "past feeling"¹ any bereavement is a burden; but there are some instances, yea, many, where it is almost, if not altogether, unbearable. When people are old and gray-headed, and have numbered their "threescore years and ten,"² we expect them to pass away, and it is a goodly sight to see our friends coming to the "grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in in his season."³ But it is painful to see the soft summer ear cut down before it could be ripened, and rather painful to see the tender blade blasted before it had time either to bud or blossom.

When it is toward evening we are looking for the sun to set, and not unfrequently the sight is glorious beyond description; but the sun goes down often while it is "yet day,"⁴ and oftener still very early in the morning, while it is "yet dark."⁵ "To every thing there is a season,"⁶ and every thing is beautiful in its time. But to see our friends perishing in the prime of life, before the summer is ended, or in early childhood

¹ Eph. iv. 19.

² Ps. xc. 10.

³ Job v. 26.

⁴ Jer. xv. 9.

⁵ John xx. 1.

⁶ Eccl. iii. 1.

and in the promising spring season, seems untimely, and there is no beauty in the sad spectacle. And yet this is the burden that very many have to carry.

The time was when, with scarcely an exception, the children followed their parents to the grave. And by the sparing mercy of "the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ"¹ this period was prolonged for many years. But now the children are oftener followed by their sorrowful parents to the place "appointed for all living."² More than half of those who are born into the world pass out of it in their infancy, and their little graves covered with white flowers, so like themselves, seem to be the very footsteps of Jesus, the gentle shepherd who gathered the lambs with His arm, and carried them in His bosom, and went by the way of the cemetery to the better country.

And, sorer still, these bitterest bereavements are so common now that many parents are as lonely and solitary as before they were set in families. There are no "olive-plants round about thy table"³ any more. In quick succession, one after another, they were all plucked up in the "time to plant." And they were so rooted and grounded in your best love that your poor heart was torn by the plucking up. And you could not help crying out in these weeping words of the weeping prophet: "Woe is me for my hurt! my wound is grievous: but I said, Truly this is a grief, and I must bear it. My tabernacle is spoiled, and all my cords are broken: my children are gone forth of me, and they are not: there is none to

¹ Tit. ii. 13.

² Job xxx. 23.

³ Ps. cxxviii. 3.

stretch forth my tent any more, and to set up my curtains." ¹

But, though gone away in the body, your children are present with you in the spirit. Your love for them and their love for you could not be quenched by "the swelling of Jordan." ² You are as dear to them as they are to you, and they remember you as much as you remember them, and they can see you, though you cannot see them: "Seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses." ³

The windows of heaven have been likened to those convex windows which you have often seen. In looking out through them you can see every thing clearly, but those who are without and striving to look in can see nothing distinctly. They look "through a glass darkly," ⁴ and see nothing but dim shadows inside. Such may be the windows of heaven; but, whether they are or not, we are sure and certain that our departed friends are neither far away nor forgetful of us. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" ⁵

"Dear dead ! they are become
Like guardian angels to us ;
And distant heaven, like home,
Through them begins to woo us ;
Love that was earthly wings
Its flight to holier places ;
The dead are sacred things,
That multiply our graces.

¹ Jer. x. 19, 20.

² Jer. xii. 5.

³ Heb. xii. 1.

⁴ 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

⁵ Heb. i. 14.

They whom we loved on earth
Attract us now to heaven ;
Who shared our grief and mirth
Back to us now are given.
They move with noiseless foot
Gravely and sweetly round us,
And their soft touch hath cut
Full many a chain that bound us."

If only we could realize what our loved ones are, and where they are and what they are doing, our burden of sorrow would make wings and fly away, and we would be burdened only with overmuch joy. It was after the following manner that I once succeeded in comforting "a mother in Israel,"¹ who, like Rachel, refused to be comforted because her children were not. I found her in great distress, having just returned from the cemetery, where she often went to weep. And remembering that she came from England, and seeing a portrait of Victoria hanging on the wall, I asked her whether she ever saw the queen when she resided in London ; and she answered, "Yes, I saw her several times when she was driving out in the park with Prince Albert." "Were you ever presented to her in any of her royal palaces?" I further inquired ; and, with manifest astonishment, she answered, "No: none but great people can expect so great a favor."

"Well, now," I continued, "suppose her gracious Majesty had sent over here and commanded your one only daughter to come back to that country which you call home, and be a maid of honor in her court ; and suppose she had sent again and again, and commanded

¹ 2 Sam. xx. 19.

your two sons to come away over the sea and enter her Majesty's cabinet, would you not feel proud of their promotion, and rejoice when your friends called to congratulate you upon the high positions they had attained? And since your daughter has gone up higher, and is a maid of honor in the palace of the Great King, yea, even a 'queen in gold of Ophir,'¹ and since your two sons are 'kings and priests unto God,'² ought you not rather to rejoice and be exceeding glad?" And she said, "I should rejoice henceforth, and I shall rejoice. And who am I, and what am I, that I should be the mother of three saints in heaven?"

Besides, the departed ones shall return as they went away. I believe in the resurrection of the body. The material part of man is redeemed as well as the immaterial. "Even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body."³ The soul was never dust, and cannot be buried. Only this mortal body can "return to the earth as it was,"⁴ and this it is that shall be raised again: "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."⁵ And although this doctrine, which is peculiar to our religion, is so plainly revealed in the gospel, there are many speculating about the great mystery, and asking ever and again this old question, "With what body do they come?"⁶

They come each one with his own body, and we shall recognize the familiar features, and all the old

¹ Ps. xlv. 9.

■ Rev. i. 6.

³ Rom. viii. 23.

⁴ Eccl. xii. 7.

■ 1 Cor. xv. 53.

⁶ 1 Cor. xv. 35.

endearing relations shall be restored, — “Thy brother shall rise again.”¹ The resurrection of Jesus was at the same time the pledge and the pattern of our own. He rose again from the dead. The empty sepulchre is the first witness for this wonderful truth. It was a new tomb, and the Saviour’s body was the only one that it contained, and on the morning of the third day nothing was found in it but the linen clothes “and the napkin that was about His head.”² And, perceiving that the empty tomb would be the best evidence of the resurrection of Jesus, His enemies, with their persuasive gold and promise of security, tempted the soldiers to say, “His disciples came by night, and stole Him away while we slept.”³ But this was too barefaced a falsehood to be believed. Did these lying soldiers sleep there that night? Did they all sleep at the sepulchre? And, if they did, how could they tell who came and stole Him away when they were sleeping?

But the testimony of the empty sepulchre is confirmed by the Saviour Himself. When He appeared among the disciples that same evening “they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And He said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.”⁴

No, it was not a spirit that they saw coming through

¹ John xi. 23.

² John xx. 7.

³ Matt. xxviii. 13.

⁴ Luke xxiv. 37-39.

their closed doors ; but it was a spiritual body, it was a powerful body, it was a glorious body, and yet it was the same body that died and was buried. "Come, see the place where the Lord lay."¹ In the same manner our dear friends who "sleep in Jesus,"² and ourselves also, shall be raised again. "And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly."³ "For our conversation is in heaven ; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ : who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body."⁴

This blessed hope of a resurrection, and a reunion with the loved ones who are not lost, should lighten the burden of bereavement, and lift it clean away from our broken hearts. "Thus saith the Lord, Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears : for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord ; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope in thine end, saith the Lord, that thy children shall come again to their own border."⁵

Death is a burden. And, God be thanked, it is the last that shall be laid upon us. To many every other burden is light in comparison of this. The very thought of dying has unmanned the stoutest hearts, and at the first approach of "the last enemy" the bravest soldiers have trembled and turned pale. Even the Saviour, the man strong and mighty, seems to have been overburdened when He thought about the "decease which

¹ Matt. xxviii. 6.² 1 Thess. iv. 14.³ 1 Cor. xv. 49.⁴ Phil. iii. 20, 21.⁵ Jer. xxxi. 16, 17.

He should accomplish at Jerusalem,"¹ and with strong crying and tears He prayed that this cup might pass from Him. And if Jesus was "exceeding sorrowful"² and sore afraid as He drew near to death, it is no wonder if we experience the same feelings.

To think that the soul and the body must be separated. That the soul must go away alone, a naked thing, to God who gave it, and that the body must moulder in the ground, and be resolved into its original elements, in obedience to the Divine behest, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."³ To be constrained to leave a home so sweet, and friends so dear, and little children so dependent. To close our eyes for ever on this beautiful world, and bid farewell to all its friendships, and then to say to corruption, "Thou art my father; to the worm, Thou art my mother, and my sister."⁴ Surely there is nothing pleasant in such an exchange as this, and it is utterly vain and almost wicked for any man or minister to strive to soften death down and make it desirable. It was nothing but a curse in the beginning, it has been nothing but a curse ever since, and it will be nothing but a curse till the end.

But, yet, after all, this great burden may be borne with joy and thanksgiving, just because Jesus died and rose again and will be present with us to turn the curse into the blessing, and "the shadow of death into the morning."⁵ He died for us, and by dying He has "abolished death, and hath brought life and

¹ Luke ix. 31.

² Matt. xxvi. 38.

³ Gen. iii. 19.

⁴ Job xvii. 14.

⁵ Amos v. 8.

immortality to light.”¹ In that lost battle on the cross Jesus won His greatest victory, and became the mightiest conqueror the very moment that He was conquered, and, henceforth “clothed with a vesture dipped in blood,”² He comes to “deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”³ He took away from death the sting, and without the sting the serpent is as harmless as the dove. “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁴

We have never witnessed any thing so transporting as the last and loveliest days of some who could never look forward to their dissolution with any composure at all. Bunyan’s dream was not all a dream, for we have seen and heard the interpretation thereof.

“Now I saw in my dream, that by this time the pilgrims were got over the enchanted ground; and entering into the country of Beulah, whose air was very sweet and pleasant, the way lying directly through it, they solaced themselves there for a season. Yea, here they heard continually the singing of birds, and saw every day the flowers appear in the earth, and heard the voice of the turtle in the land. In this country the sun shineth night and day: wherefore this was beyond the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and also out of the reach of Giant Despair; neither could they from this place so much as see Doubting

¹ 2 Tim. i. 10.

³ Heb. ii. 15.

² Rev. xix. 13.

⁴ 1 Cor. xv. 55, 57.

Castle. Here they were within sight of the city they were going to : also here met them some of the inhabitants thereof ; for in this land the shining ones commonly walked, because it was upon the borders of heaven. In this land also the contract between the bride and the bridegroom was renewed : yea, here, as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so did their God rejoice over them. Here they had no want of corn and wine ; for in this place they met with abundance of what they had sought for in all their pilgrimage. Here they heard voices from out of the city, loud voices, saying, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold thy salvation cometh ! Behold ! His reward is with Him ! Here all the inhabitants of the country called them, The holy people, the redeemed of the Lord, sought out, and not forsaken.

“Now as they walked in this land, they had more rejoicing than in parts more remote from the kingdom to which they were bound, and, drawing near to the city, they had yet a more perfect view thereof. It was builded of pearls and precious stones, also the streets thereof were paved with gold ; so that by reason of the natural glory of the city, and the reflection of the sunbeams upon it, Christian with desire fell sick. Hopeful also had a fit or two of the same disease. Wherefore here they lay by it a while, crying out because of their pangs, If you see my Beloved, tell Him that I am sick of love.”

When his moving tent was pitched in this “delight-some land,”¹ and only one day’s journey from the

¹ Mal. iii. 12.

heavenly Jerusalem, the last of the Scottish martyrs thus expressed himself: "I have found the cross of Christ sweet and lovely unto me; for I have had many joyful hours, and not one fearful thought since I came to prison, and I am now longing for the joyful moment of my dissolution."

When he had but two hours to live, he exclaimed: "Oh, how can I contain the thoughts of this, to be within two hours of the crown of glory!" When he heard the drum beat, which was the signal for the guard to take him from the cell, transported with the joy that is unspeakable, he cried out: "Yonder is the welcome warning to my marriage. The bridegroom is coming: I am ready; I am ready."

And lest any of you should say that the martyr age is over and gone, and that we need not look for such rapture now, when the earthly house of this tabernacle is trembling to be taken down, we would remind you that even in these latter days the dying saint often passes into glory with as much triumph as any of the witnesses: "at evening time it shall be light."¹

A few years ago it was my privilege to minister to one whose dissolution seemed nothing less than a transfiguration. The first time I called to see him the fear of death distressed him very much, and his desire to live was exceeding great. As he was a young man with a happy family, and a thorough-going Christian, I did not wonder that he wanted to get better; and as death is such "an evil thing and

¹ Zech. xiv. 7.

bitter,"¹ I could not marvel at his distress. But I repeated to him that precious promise, "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass ; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be."² I reminded him also that Mr. Despondency's daughter, Miss Much-afraid, went singing through the swellings of Jordan ; and expressed the confident expectation that as the time of his departure drew near he would be made equal to the great emergency. And it was so, and more abundantly. Before the weaning time was over, he was ready to be offered. The hour and the power of darkness proved the hour and the power of grace ; and the beautiful brightness that adorned the evening of his righteous life neither speech nor language can describe.

He feared no evil, experienced no doubts, and saw no darkness at all. He was beforehand with the last enemy in the matter of weighing anchor ; "having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ ; which is far better."³ His dying couch was spread in the very vestibule of glory, and he left the world before the world left him ; and distanced the swift-wheeled chariot of heaven, with the wings of an ardent longing to be at home. Tears were shed, but not by his eyes. Sighs were heaved, but not by his heart. They were comforting words that fell from his lips, as they were quivering and growing pale. They were touching and prevailing prayers that he offered when his tongue was cleaving to the roof of his mouth. And when all was almost over, and he could neither see nor speak, his countenance shined with beauty bor-

¹ Jer. ii. 19.

■ Deut. xxxiii. 25.

³ Phil. i. 23.

rowed from above. God's glory smote His dying friend, Fitz Henry Knight, and all those who were gathered round his bed, "looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel." ¹

"Is this a death-bed where a Christian lies ?

Yes, but not his, — 'tis death itself that dies."

Such are some of the sorrows beneath which we "groan, being burdened ;" ² and it is pleasant to remark how opportunely the "man of sorrows" ³ comes to our relief. He is every thing to us, and He will do every thing for us. In every duty, in every difficulty, and in all our distresses He meets us with His love, and makes His grace sufficient for us ; and always, with all our cares and crosses, we are "The burden of the Lord."

Am I burdened with sin ? Jesus is my sin-bearer, — the spotless Lamb of God on whom my guilt was laid : "Who loved me, and gave Himself for me." ⁴ Is poverty my portion ? Jesus was poorer than any man. More than once the barrel's last handful was gone, and "He was an hungered ;" and when sitting down to my crust of bread, I cannot help remembering that the first of His nine benedictions is pronounced upon me : "Blessed be ye poor : for yours is the kingdom of God." ⁵ Am I sick ? Jesus is my sickness-bearer, and my beloved Physician : "who healeth all thy diseases ; who redeemeth thy life from destruction ; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness, and tender mercies." ⁶

¹ Acts vi. 15.

² 2 Cor. v. 4.

³ Isa. liii. 3.

⁴ Gal. ii. 20.

⁵ Luke vi. 20.

⁶ Ps. ciii. 3, 4.

Am I reproached? Jesus was persecuted and mocked and spoken against and put to death; but He rose again from the grave, and ever liveth to take the poison of asps out of every fiery tongue. Am I bereaved? Jesus lost a friend, and wept and groaned again and again when He was going to the place where they laid him. He knows just how I feel, for He has felt the same; and He never forgets to mingle His tears with mine, and to give me "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."¹ Am I going to die? Jesus died, and has become the life of death and the light of the grave; and I know that He will not forsake me when heart and flesh are failing: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."²

When Jesus was going to Calvary, carrying His own cross, the burden seemed greater than He could bear. His strength was weakened in the way. And as they led Him along, "they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus."³ To his praise be it spoken, this stranger from Africa came to the help of his Saviour; and walking behind Him he took up and carried that end of the cross that was trailing on the ground, — the lightest end, for the heaviest end was still upheld by the Master.

So, now and always, when the cross of broken health,

¹ Isa. lxi. 3.

² Ps. xxiii. 4.

■ Luke xxiii. 26.

or bereavement, or reproach, or any such thing, is laid upon us, we bear it after Jesus. Our "companion in tribulation" ¹ goes before us, and we come behind Him just like Simon; and the same cross is laid upon us both, but the heaviest end is upborne by the Saviour's shoulder. He carries more than half our burden, and, besides, He gives us strength to carry our part. And not only so but He carries us as well. "Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you." ² He careth for you always and everywhere.

Of Him we read, and we love to read it often: "He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom." ³ And when they grow up in His bosom and cease to be lambs, He does not cease to carry them: "Even to your old age I am He; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you." ⁴ And as the legs of His resurrection body are stronger than those that rested at Jacob's well, and bowed themselves beneath the cross, we need never fear that they will ever fail to carry the heaviest load. The Saviour's "glorious body" is incapable of fatigue, and shall never need rest or help any more. "The Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary." ⁵

When Cleopas and his companion were going into the country, shortly after the crucifixion, each carrying a heavy burden on his heart, a seeming stranger joined them and journeyed with them; and by His

¹ Rev. i. 9.

² 1 Pet. v. 7.

³ Isa. xl. 11.

⁴ Isa. xlvi. 4.

⁵ Isa. xl. 28.

timely sympathy, Scripture words of sweet comfort and good cheer, He lifted their burdens from them. And pouring the oil and wine of His best love into the wounds worn by the burdens, their steps became light and eager, and before they were aware they came to Emmaus. And they said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures?"¹

So, whenever and wherever we walk and are sad, this same Jesus comes, perhaps in the disguise of some wayfaring man, and walks with us along our sorrowful way. He kindly enters into conversation with us. He asks us questions, and loves to have us tell Him what He knows already. He marks our sadness, and makes mention of it of a set purpose to relieve us. He has so many sweet and gentle ways of getting at the heart. "My Beloved put in His hand by the hole of the door."² And while we are telling Him all the story of our grief He is busy taking it all away; and, when the story is ended, behold, it is gone. And then, with many comfortable words of Scripture concerning Himself, He makes our hearts to burn within us with the love He came from heaven to kindle. "Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Ammi-nadib."³

Not long ago, as I was returning from the village to my quiet country home, carrying a package of books, that was rather heavy, a neighbor overtook me, and as he was driving by in his carriage, I asked him if he would be kind enough to take my bundle

¹ Luke xxiv. 32.

² Cant. v. 4.

³ Cant. vi. 12.

and leave it at the house. And, reining up his horses immediately, he said, "Yes, and you too : get right in here, and I will carry you home with pleasure." And laying my burden down at his feet, and lifting me to a seat at his side, he drove on, and in a few moments he left me at my own door, — me and my burden.

So as we are going home to heaven, weary and heavy-laden, as we often are, Jesus comes driving by in His glittering chariot, "the midst thereof being paved with love."¹ Immediately His tender heart is touched by our weariness. He sees that we are faint and foot-sore, — "faint, yet pursuing ;"² or, sorer still, He notices that we are sitting at the road side to rest a while, as He rested at the well when He was "wearied with His journey."³ And blessed be His blessed name, He never waits for us to ask Him to take either our burden or ourselves ; but stopping at once, and holding back the horses of fire, impatient for their Master, He calls us to Himself, saying, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."⁴

And if we find no rest after taking our place in the Saviour's chariot, and no relief from our burden, it is only just because we insist upon carrying it ourselves. We will not part with our load when we may, but rather cling to it as though it were something which we ought to cherish. And in this respect we resemble the thoughtless traveller who came into the railway car last summer, and after he had taken a seat

¹ Cant. iii. 10.

³ John iv. 6.

² Judg. viii. 4.

⁴ Matt. xi. 28.

at our side, he still held on his lap a large carpet-bag. He was so pale and coughed so much and appeared so feeble that I felt sorry for him : and, entering into conversation with him, I learned that he had been in poor health for some time, and was then on his way to Saratoga, hoping to get help from the healing waters of that modern Bethesda. And, perceiving that he made no motion to lay his burden down, I could not help saying to him : "It seems to me that there is no need for you to carry that load any longer." And as he laid it off his lap he smiled and said : "Sure enough, what was I thinking about?"

When Napoleon was walking out one day at St. Helena, in company with a female friend, they chanced to meet a laboring man, whose back was bending beneath a heavy burden. With his usual courtesy, the great emperor immediately stepped aside ; but, perceiving that his companion was still inclined to keep the narrow path, he mildly said to her : "Respect the burden, madam, respect the burden."

And, like this thoughtless woman, thousands of our race respect neither the burden nor the burden-bearer. But Jesus, the brother "born for adversity,"¹ has great respect for both. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee."² Thee and thy burden. He will both carry you and the load you carry. Nor need any fear that He will ever faint under such a crushing weight. Blessed be our strong Helper : "His legs are as pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold."³

¹ Prov. xvii. 17.

² Ps. lv. 22.

³ Cant. v. 15.

Yes, there it is again, the gold, the gold, set in sockets of fine gold, — set in sockets of fine gold. “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of Him!”¹ The feet of Him who hath given to every one of His “little children” Benjamin’s place and blessing: “The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by Him; and the Lord shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between His shoulders.”²

¹ Isa. lii. 7.

² Deut. xxxiii. 12.

Dearest Lord, we thank thee! We are weak and wicked, and could not bear our own burdens nor ourselves, but thou hast done it, according to thy word; and, glory be to the Lamb of God and to the Lion of the tribe of Judah, thou art doing it still, and thou wilt continue to do it even unto the end. Because thou hast been our help, therefore under the shadow of thy wings will we rejoice. And when, through thy great amazing grace, we are come to thine everlasting kingdom, we will cast our crowns, in one glittering heap, at thy blessed feet, and the first outburst of our praise and our perpetual ascription of glory shall be: “Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

HIS COUNTENANCE.

CHAPTER XII.

"His countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars."

BY all accounts Lebanon is the most remarkable mountain in all the Land of Promise, and in one respect it is the most remarkable mountain in all the world, because it is the only one that was reckoned worthy, in some sense, to represent the Saviour. Frequent and honorable mention is made of it in the Old Testament. The Hebrew prophets and poets delighted to dwell upon its rich and variegated splendors ; and it suggested to their minds much of the best imagery of their inspired books.

Its fame, like itself, went abroad beyond the limits of the little land of Canaan. Moses had heard of it in the wilderness, and perhaps in Egypt ; and when he came to the plain of Jordan he must have seen its long ranges, with their white peaks, stretching away like snow banks along the northern horizon, and further than his undimmed eye could reach. And, enchanted with the distant prospect, he could not help desiring to have a nearer and a better view of its almost unearthly grandeur. And it is the only part of "the glory of all lands"¹ that he mentioned by name in his last prayer, just before he went up into Mount Nebo to die there : "I pray thee, let me go

¹ Ezek. xx. 6.

over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon.”¹

That holy man of God and great prophet, who was himself a distinguished type of the coming Messiah, would have thought himself most happy if he could have been permitted to cross the river to look at Lebanon in its ever changing and bewildering beauty and sublimity, as it spread its great roots for more than a hundred miles along the northern portion of Palestine, rising here and there into lower and higher elevations, skirted with tall cedars clothed with never-fading verdure and crowned with perpetual snow.

But, with all its glory and majesty and beauty, this great mountain is less than nothing in comparison of Him who hath said, “The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool.”² The heavenly substance is far above all earthly shadows. “The King eternal, immortal, invisible,”³ can neither be fitly represented nor sufficiently honored by any thing that He has made: “And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt-offering.”⁴

And neither in this world nor in the next can there be any happiness half so great as “sitting at the feet of Jesus,”⁵ and “looking unto Jesus,”⁶—that sweetest place to sit, and that sweetest face to see, whether in sickness or in health, whether in sorrow or in joy, whether in adversity or in prosperity, whether in this world or in the world to come, —

“Here it is I find my heaven.”

¹ Deut. iii. 25.

² Isa. lxvi. 1.

³ 1 Tim. i. 17.

⁴ Isa. xl. 16.

⁵ Luke viii. 35.

⁶ Heb. xii. 2.

To know that Jesus is mine and that I am His ; to experience the transforming power of His redeeming love from day to day ; to have the sustaining, comforting, and sanctifying presence of His Holy Spirit, — this is the highest, the happiest, and the holiest life, because it is the life of heaven upon earth.

“Jesus, the vision of thy face
Hath overpowering charms.”

Besides, it is only by sitting at the feet of Jesus, and looking unto Jesus, and by constant communion and fellowship with Jesus, that we can get any thing like a correct idea of His unspeakable worth. The rumbling thunder may strike the inattentive ear, and a flash of lightning may arrest the careless spectator for a moment ; but it is only the earnest listener who can hear “the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry-trees.”¹ It is only the wakeful watcher who can discern the signs of the times, and catch the first glimpse of the Saviour coming over the hills and mountains of transgression, standing behind our wall and showing Himself through the lattice. Jesus, Master, more and more “let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice ; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.”²

Very beautiful, exceedingly interesting and instructive are all the features of our Beloved, but the one now coming under review excels them all. For poetic boldness, exquisite taste, perfect elegance, and surpassing grandeur, there is nothing like it in the Bible. “His countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars.”³ And as we are drawing near to see this

¹ 2 Sam. v. 24.

² Cant. ii. 14.

³ Cant. v. 15.

great sight, and reverently to inquire into its spiritual meaning, we can almost hear a voice from heaven, saying unto us, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet ; for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." ¹

Lebanon is a great mountain. In every respect it is the greatest mountain in all the region, where it is set fast on its sure foundation of everlasting rocks. Its great roots stretch for more than the whole length of the northern border of Israel, and including the valleys of considerable extent between its two great chains and its numerous little hills, it covers almost the whole country. It is also the highest mountain in the Holy Land, rising, as it does, for more than two miles above the level of the "great and wide sea" ² that washes its majestic feet.

And for these reasons it seems a fitter emblem of that great Saviour whose "righteousness is like the great mountains," ³ and whose "faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds," ⁴ and who is to all His people "as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." ⁵

And here it needs to be remarked that the word "countenance" is not to be taken in its usual and restricted sense, but in its original meaning rather. It includes every other feature as well as the face, and was intended to foreshadow the Saviour's perfect stature and personal appearance. In physical proportions Jesus was made like unto His brethren. He was probably no taller than His twelve apostles, and indeed some of them might have been taller than their

¹ Exod. iii. 5.

² Ps. civ. 25.

³ Ps. xxxvi. 6.

⁴ Ps. xxxvi. 5.

⁵ Isa. xxxii. 2.

Master. But in dignity and grace, in majesty and beauty of every kind, He was superior to all His fellows. He was "higher than the kings of the earth,"¹ "higher than the heavens."² "Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come."³ He was a goodly man,—a man of measure; "a man of countenance,"⁴—and His countenance was like Lebanon.

Lebanon is a fruitful mountain. For the most part the mountainous regions of the world are barren and unfruitful. On their rocky sides and summits there is not depth enough of earth to support the scantiest vegetation; and, if there were, between the bleak winds of winter and the burning suns of summer nothing could flourish well. But the high and lofty ridges of Lebanon are an exception to the general rule. Favorably located near the tropics, the climate is excellent. And from their base up to their snowy peaks they are covered with the richest soil; and, as there are innumerable springs all over these mountains, they are susceptible of the highest cultivation, and every inch of ground almost is turned to good account by the industrious inhabitants. In the absence of natural levels, thousands of miles of artificial terraces of stone have been constructed, to prevent the winter rains from washing the earth away, and also to retain the water requisite for the irrigation of the crops; and these stone walls are literally covered all over with

¹ Ps. lxxxix. 27.

² Heb. vii. 26.

³ Eph. i. 21.

⁴ Marginal reading. 2 Sam. xxiii. 21.

clustering vines of the most varied and luxuriant vegetation in the world.

Before the glory departed from this great mountain, every foot of its good ground was planted every year, and yielded a plentiful harvest to the patient husbandman. And enough of the old glory still lingers in many localities to show what "a fountain of gardens"¹ these hills must have been before they began to feel the blighting influence of the curse that came on that divinest region of the globe, by reason of the disobedience of its inhabitants.

Yes, this mountain is goodly now, though not so good as in the days of Moses and David and Solomon. Many beautiful tokens of its former fertility may be seen there at the present day. Vineyards, whose purple grapes would not blush beside those of Eshcol; olive orchards of vast extent; fig-trees, almond-trees, and pomegranate bushes without number, — are to be met with in every direction along the lofty ranges of Lebanon. "And the little hills rejoice on every side. The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing."²

And it was doubtless because these mountains were so productive of corn and wine and oil, and all manner of pleasant fruits, that they were taken to prefigure that dear Redeemer who is the plentiful source of all our temporal and spiritual blessings: our daily bread, and the bread of life; our raiment to put on, and the robe of righteousness to cover all our sins; our milk

¹ Cant. iv. 15.

² Ps. lxxv. 12, 13.

and honey, and "the sincere milk of the word,"¹ which is sweeter than honey. The gold and silver and cattle on a thousand hills, and all the green fields and fruitful seasons of the world, are the harvest of the Saviour's love. Jesus suffered and died that we might have bread to eat and water to drink, and His own flesh and blood, — which are meat indeed and drink indeed, — and in Him is all our fruit found.

The covenant of grace was made for both worlds, — "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."² And as the promised land was prepared for the vine that was brought out of Egypt and planted therein, covering the mountains with its shadow, so "My Well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill; and He fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine."³ Himself is the choicest vine, — the true vine, ever running over the wall, and presenting such rich clusters as these for us to pluck and eat, "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance,"⁴ until those "days of heaven upon the earth"⁵ shall come again, when every remnant of the curse shall be swept clean away, and "instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle-tree;"⁶ when "the ploughman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt."⁷

¹ 1 Pet. ii. 2.² 1 Tim. iv. 8.³ Isa. v. 1.⁴ Gal. v. 22.⁵ Deut. xi. 21.⁶ Isa. lv. 13.⁷ Amos ix. 13.

Lebanon is a fragrant mountain. Its ample skirts are embroidered with cedar groves and fir-trees and pine-trees and orange-trees and lemon-trees, whose bark and blossoms and cones and fruit and leaves are all aromatic ; and the very shrubs and bushes breathe forth a pleasant flavor. And besides the great mountains and valleys, the little hills and dales are spangled all over with wild flowers of rainbow hues and richest fragrance,—acres of sweet thyme, square miles of myrtle and mulberry trees, and numerous gardens, where roses and daisies and poppies and tulips and anemones and geraniums are growing together, making “a coat of many colors”¹ for the old man of the mountains, and renewing his youth with their sweet perfumes.

There is an aroma about Lebanon all the year round ; but, in the spring season, when the flowers appear on the earth, and the time of the singing of birds is come, and “the fig-tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell,”² then the mountain itself seems to bud and burst into full blossom, and sends its fragrance so far abroad that the sailors out at sea can detect its proximity before they come within sight of its distant summits, and perfumed with more than “all powders of the merchant”³ it is, without a figure, a “hill of frankincense,”⁴ and “mountains of spices.”⁵

In describing a delightful visit that he made to these heavenly hills, a recent traveller says : “I spent the night at the village Ehden, which, for beauty, might

¹ Gen. xxxvii. 3.

² Cant. ii. 13.

■ Cant. iii. 6.

⁴ Cant. iv. 6.

⁵ Cant. viii. 14.

almost pass for Eden. Beneath the shade of one of its fragrant walnuts I lay the long afternoon, gazing dreamily down the mountain side, and away out over the boundless sea. How sweet and fresh on that balmy evening, when the dew began to fall, was the smell of Lebanon !”

And in the profusion of its perpetual fragrance we find another interesting reason why this “goodly mountain” was selected to be the type of our sweet Saviour, who was anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows ; whose very “garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia,”¹ and whose “name is as ointment poured forth.”² Frankincense and myrrh were among the gifts of the wise men to the Holy Child Jesus in the manger at Bethlehem ; and these were but the earnest of that superabundance of incense which shall be brought unto Him in the prayers and praises of the saints, until this whole world, like an alabaster box of spikenard very costly, shall be broken at His blessed feet, and all heaven shall be filled with the odor of it.

Lebanon is a mountain of fountains. As there went four great rivers through the primeval paradise to water the garden, so, for the same purpose, there are four great rivers flowing through the promised land, and all these rivers rise in the roots of Lebanon. And, growing wider and deeper and clearer in their course, they run out in every direction through the whole country, blessing it with their bounty, and building up cities and villages on their banks. And

¹ Ps. xlv. 8.

² Cant. i. 3.

besides these four principal streams that make the land of promise "well watered everywhere,"¹ and in many places "a delightful land," there are other streams without number, running among the hills and through the valleys, making the grass so green, the trees so fair, and the flowers so bright, that their beauty cannot be described. Indeed, the whole mountain is emphatically a mountain of fountains gushing out of the rocks on every side, and rushing away pellucid as the dew of Hermon, and plentiful as the holy waters in Ezekiel's vision. And on these "streams from Lebanon"² the whole country depends for its beauty and fertility. The Holy Land is "a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig-trees, and pomegranates, a land of oil-olive, and honey,"³ because it is "a land of brooks of water, of fountains, and depths that spring out of valleys and hills."⁴ The plain of Jordan, which was "even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt,"⁵ would have been no better than the desert of Sinai without the stream from Lebanon by which it was so well watered everywhere. And the plain of Damascus, which is so Eden-like in its loveliness that it seems to be a very portion of the "better country, that is, an heavenly,"⁶ dropped down to earth, would be a Sahara of barrenness, were it not for its two splendid streams from Lebanon, brimming over with bounty, — the Abana and Pharpar, — which were deservedly esteemed "better than all the waters of Israel."⁷

¹ Gen. xiii. 10.² Cant. iv. 15.³ Deut. viii. 8.⁴ Deut. viii. 7.⁵ Gen. xiii. 10.⁶ Heb. xi. 16.⁷ 2 Kings v. 12.

And, although the springs in Lebanon and the "streams from Lebanon" are not so abundant now as before the noble forests disappeared, there is still a goodly number of perennial fountains bursting forth and sending their "cold flowing waters"¹ down to bless the plains below. And in the warm season of the year, when rain seldom falls, and the valleys seem like a burning furnace, and the firmament a flaming fire, and all the nether springs and water-brooks are dry as summer dust, then these streams from Lebanon flow down all the fuller and all the faster, because the same scorching sun that burns up the meadows, and changes the pasture-fields into such parched ground that the beasts groan and the cattle are oppressed, pours its embers on the everlasting snows that crown the heights of Lebanon; and, as these speedily melt into the purest water in the world, thousands of streams are formed to take the places of those that failed, and as they go sparkling and laughing down to satisfy the thirsty land they give drink to all the beasts of the field and all the dwellers in the plains. And the greater the drought the more abundant is this seasonable supply from the mountain.

And here again we find another good reason why the Holy Spirit selected Lebanon to represent that dear Saviour who is the fountain of living water for the world. And as through the gospel His grace, mercy, and peace are poured out in such copious streams, "the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and

¹ Jer. xviii. 14.

blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice, even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes." ¹

To the thirsty man there is nothing so refreshing as water; and for this reason this element, which is necessary to our existence, is often taken by the sacred writers to represent that Saviour after whom the soul is ever thirsting, and without whom it must needs perish for ever: "For there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." ² And His grace is just as free as water, and far more abundant and refreshing, and in the season of drought it shall not fail. "It shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem: half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be." ³

It was a day of darkness and a season of great distress when Hagar was wrongfully sent away from her husband's home. With sorrow like unto which there is no sorrow she took Ishmael with one hand, and holding a little bread and a bottle of water on her shoulder with the other, so she wandered into the wilderness of Beer-sheba. But the wilderness without

¹ Isa. xxxv. 1, 2, 6, 7.

² Acts iv. 12.

³ Zech. xiv. 8.

was a perfect paradise in comparison of the sorer wilderness within. And at last, when "the water was spent in the bottle,"¹ leaving the lad under one of the shrubs to die, the broken-hearted mother went "a good way off, as it were a bow-shot,"² that she might not see the last struggle of her one only child ; just then and there in that thirsty land, as she was sitting down under the shadow of death, the darkness of which was doubled, "God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water : and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink."³ And thus his perishing life was spared, and "he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness,"⁴ and became the father of a great nation.

When the children of Israel were encamped at Rephidim, they could find no water ; and, tormented with thirst, they murmured against Moses, saying, "Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?"⁵ And when they were almost ready to stone him Moses went to the throne of grace and cried unto the Lord, and, in answer to prayer, he was directed to take the rod that worked so many wonders and "smite the rock"⁶ in Horeb, and when he had done as he was commanded immediately "the waters gushed out ; they ran in the dry places like a river."⁷ And they did all drink "of that spiritual Rock that followed them : and that Rock was Christ."⁸

¹ Gen. xxi. 15.⁴ Gen. xxi. 20.⁷ Ps. cv. 41.² Gen. xxi. 16.⁵ Exod. xvii. 3.⁸ 1 Cor. x. 4.³ Gen. xxi. 19.⁶ Exod. xvii. 6.

And when we are suffering severely in the dry and thirsty land of some desperate sorrow, when all the nether springs are empty and we are going in vain to the "broken cisterns" of human sympathy that can hold no water, Jesus points us to "a spring shut up, a fountain sealed;"¹ or from His riven side He gives us His own grace, abounding in the time of need like "streams from Lebanon," that we, "always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work."² "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit."³

And after we have passed through this wilderness these streams of grace shall follow us into the better country, and reappear in the "pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb;"⁴ making the great city glad, and giving refreshment for ever to all the redeemed in glory. "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."⁵

But, as the cedars of Lebanon are brought into the

¹ Cant. iv. 12.

² 2 Cor. ix. 8.

³ Jer. xvii. 7, 8.

⁴ Rev. xxii. 1.

⁵ Rev. vii. 16, 17.

simile by the royal preacher, they must not be quite overlooked, especially as they cannot be separated from the mountain to which they lend their lustre and of which they are the emerald crown.

The cedar is a strong tree. It will grow in any country and almost anywhere, if only it can find water enough to satisfy its quenchless thirst. It is a tree of such holy and historic interest that it has been planted and cultivated in many lands, and it is worthy of special remark that there are more cedars now flourishing in the vicinity of London than in the mountains of Lebanon. But, while these "trees of the Lord"¹ will not refuse to thrive beside all waters, they will flourish best on their native hills and in their own congenial climate where they can breathe their own balmy air.

There is probably something in the limestone soil and water of the mountains of Lebanon which causes the cedars that grow there to spring up into their greatest stature and strength. By actual and exact measurement some of these trees are ninety feet high and forty feet in girth; and their gigantic branches, covered with thick foliage, stretch away in every direction to wrestle with the tempest's wrath, and break its force before it can reach the towering trunk within, which they guard like faithful sentinels. Besides, when the winds blow and beat upon it, the great tree is so elastic that it bends before the blast, and so survives those terrible tornadoes that break "the oaks of Bashan."

¹ Ps. civ. 16.

We do not mean to say that all the cedars in Lebanon are an overmatch for all the storms that beat upon them ; but yet there are some growing there that have gained the victory over every hurricane for more than a hundred generations, and they appear strong enough in their old age to weather the storms of a hundred generations more. When these mountains were covered all over with the glory of their cedar groves, the trees were doubtless greater and stronger than the remnant that remains. But the few that still survive are excellent emblems of strength and majesty ; and the passing centuries have only rooted them deeper down in the rifted rocks, and so toughened their fibre that they may still survive when He shall come again whose shadow they are.

But whether they shall live long enough to "clap their hands" before the Lord when He cometh "the second time without sin unto salvation,"¹ makes no matter : they are spared to the present time in the good providence of God, to be, as it would seem, a perpetual parable of that Omnipotent Saviour who is the light of our darkness and the strength of our weakness. The strongest cedars in Lebanon may fall, and soon or late they must fall, but the "plant of renown"² abideth for ever. And under His shadow we may sit down in perfect safety, and by His might we shall be made equal to every emergency. "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me : for when I am weak, then am I strong."³ "O Lord God of

¹ Heb. ix. 28.² Ezek. xxxiv. 29.³ 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10.

hosts, who is a strong Lord like unto thee? or to thy faithfulness round about thee?"¹ "Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever."²

The cedar is a beautiful tree. As its giant-like trunk and massive branches suggested, to the sacred writers, the ideas of almost divine strength and solidity, so its general appearance, and especially its close woven and leafy canopy, must have furnished them with one of the best images of the beautiful. In the botany of the Bible the cedar stands at the head of the vegetable world, and commanded the attention of Solomon, who "spake of trees, from the cedar-tree that is in Lebanon, even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall."³ It is one of the tallest of the trees of the wood, but its goodly boughs spread out so far and wide that but few trees are more symmetrical in shape. And, as its fan-like branches feathering gracefully to the end are covered all the year round with ever-green foliage, this right royal tree wears "a crown of glory that fadeth not away."⁴

The magnificent cedar so minutely described by Ezekiel is a better emblem of the Saviour than of Sennacherib. "Behold, the Assyrian was a cedar in Lebanon with fair branches, and with a shadowing

¹ Ps. lxxxix. 8.

² Jude 24.

³ 1 Kings iv. 33.

⁴ 1 Pet. v. 4.

shroud, and of an high stature ; and his top was among the thick boughs. The waters made him great, the deep set him up on high with her rivers running round about his plants, and sent out her little rivers unto all the trees of the field. Therefore, his height was exalted above all the trees of the field, and his boughs were multiplied, and his branches became long because of the multitude of waters, when he shot forth. All the fowls of heaven made their nests in his boughs, and under his branches did all the beasts of the field bring forth their young, and under his shadow dwelt all great nations. Thus was he fair in his greatness, in the length of his branches : for his root was by great waters. The cedars in the garden of God could not hide him : the fir-trees were not like his boughs, and the chestnut-trees were not like his branches ; not any tree in the garden of God was like unto him in his beauty. I have made him fair by the multitude of his branches : so that all the trees of Eden, that were in the garden of God, envied him.”¹

The cedar is an enduring tree. We have already hinted at the great age that this celebrated tree will attain. There are about twelve of them now left on Lebanon that were probably there when the Bible was written. The prophets and poets of Israel who admired them so much may have seen them. They are the patriarchs of the grove in the midst of which they stand, the aged but unfading fathers of the forest. By the native Maronites, who regard them with religious reverence, they are affec-

¹ Ezek. xxxi. 3-9.

tionately called "the twelve apostles" and "the friends of Solomon," as they earnestly believe that they are the real brothers of those that were taken by that great king for the building of the house of the Lord in Jerusalem.

But it is not so much about the cedar-tree as about the cedar-timber that we would now speak. The tree not only lives longer than any other tree, but when it is cut down its timber lasts longer. The dead wood is more enduring than the living tree. It is so indestructible that from the most ancient times down to the present day it has been taken as the type of immortality. It has proved itself a better overmatch for time than for the tempest. In its power to resist decay there is no wood like it in the world. Having learned by experience that it is more enduring than many kinds of stone, the pagan nations early made their idols of it. It was also used extensively in the east country, and elsewhere, to preserve other things from destruction. "Diffusing a perpetual fragrance through the chambers which it ceils, the worm will not corrode the book which it protects, nor the moth corrupt the garment which it guards." And, when its all but everlasting wood could not be obtained for building purposes, the timber of other trees was taken and thoroughly anointed with the oil of cedar, and thus received so much of its own amaranthine qualities that it was "subject neither to worm nor moth nor yet to rottenness."

And, turning again from the shadow to the substance, you will notice that Jesus is an enduring Sav-

iour. He is "the Tree of Life," and shall be young in His eternal years when the cedars in Lebanon shall have perished and passed away, with the everlasting hills on which they stand. All figures of speech are speechless when they are employed to set forth our abiding Saviour and His abiding love. He is the Living One. He is the Ever-living One. He is the only Ever-living One, "who only hath immortality."¹ "And He shall live, and to Him shall be given of the gold of Sheba: prayer also shall be made for Him continually; and daily shall He be praised. His name shall endure for ever: His name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in Him: all nations shall call Him blessed."²

Not long ago when the workmen were repairing the great mosque in the ancient city of Damascus, they found these prophetic words graven over the front door, "Thy kingdom, O Christ, is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations." That mosque was once a Christian church, but for more than twelve hundred years it has ranked among the very holiest sanctuaries of the Mohammedan faith. For more than twelve hundred years the blessed name of Jesus has been regularly blasphemed within its walls. But, strange as it may seem, that Christian inscription has remained in its place unimpaired by time, and undisturbed by man, as if to prove that no amount of human power and no refinement of human cruelty can destroy the everlasting kingdom or blot out the name of its everlasting King.

¹ 1 Tim. vi. 16.

² Ps. lxxii. 15, 17.

During the long dark reign of Turkish intolerance and oppression in Syria, these remarkable words were unknown even to those who passed under them so often ; but just as soon as religious liberty was partially restored to that benighted country, and our missionaries were permitted to establish a church in that beautiful city, this significant writing on the wall was brought to light, and in their "work of faith and labor of love" it gave them great encouragement. And, as the day of the Lord draweth near, that mosque may soon become a church of Christ, as it once was ; and the missionaries now preaching Jesus in Damascus may be the wise master-builders of whom it is thus written in the "sure word of prophecy."¹ "They shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations."²

And Jesus makes all His people like Himself. By His Holy Spirit He communicates to them His own immortality. "This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life ; and this life is in His Son."³ As the life of the cedar is communicated to all its branches, and as its essential oil will render other wood enduring like its own, so we live in Jesus, and He lives in us and makes us like Himself. We were dead once in trespasses and sins, but He quickened us, and raised us up, "and made us sit together in heavenly places ;"⁴ and we must die again, but He shall raise us up again and make us sit together, not in heavenly places, but in heaven itself.

¹ 2 Pet. i. 19.

³ 1 John v. 11.

² Isa. lxi. 4.

⁴ Eph. ii. 6.

Our spiritual life is the spring of life eternal, and the beginning of an existence endless as the Saviour's eternity. But this spiritual life which we call our own is not our own, neither is its full and for ever flowing river of life everlasting. "The brook in the way,"¹ and the "broad rivers and streams"² beyond, belong to the fountain from which they rise. "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me."³

When He betrothed us to Himself, Jesus did not say, I will betroth thee unto me "till death us do part." No, there was no mention made of death or parting or any such thing. The words of the covenant were these, "I will betroth thee unto me for ever."⁴ And death, the great divider, who puts asunder every other bride and bridegroom, only brings us nearer to our beloved Jesus; and because He lives we shall live also; as long as He lives we shall live also. In Him we shall be beyond the possibility of perishing. "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."⁵ "Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die."⁶ "Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels;

¹ Ps. cx. 7.

■ Isa. xxxiii. 21.

■ Gal. ii. 20.

■ Hos. ii. 19.

■ 2 Cor. v. 1.

⁶ John xi. 25, 26.

and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.”¹

The cedar is a useful tree. It was useful when growing on the mountain, or in the vale, or in any strange land. It was such a goodly sight that to the God-fearing and devout minds of the Old Testament writers it suggested many delightful images which are the sources of much precious instruction. Its dense and sombre shadows helped to preserve those perennial springs that formed “the streams from Lebanon ;”² and, as from bark and cone and leaves it breathed a balsamic odor, the passing breezes were burdened with its sweet perfume, and carried far away upon their wings “the smell of Lebanon ;”³ and, as it covered the mountain summer and winter with the spring-like verdure of its never-fading branches, it became what was proudly called “the glory of Lebanon.”⁴

But, however useful the cedar might have been in its living day, it was far more useful when it was dead. And for this special purpose that noble tree was planted by the hand of God, that it might be most useful when cut down by the hand of man.

From the time that the peculiar people entered Palestine, the cedars of Lebanon were felled and hewn and used in all their works of architecture. The beams and boards of their dwellings were made of cedar, and the “smell of Lebanon” was in every house. The timber of cedar entered largely into the

¹ Luke xx. 36.

■ Cant. iv. 15.

² Cant. iv. 11.

⁴ Isa. lx. 13.

construction of Solomon's Temple, that only house of which God was the architect, and which was made after a heavenly pattern, that it might be a better type of Jesus who was to be, and was, the greater glory of the latter house. The royal palace was "an house of cedar,"¹ and the royal chariot was made of the same material. "King Solomon made himself a chariot of the wood of Lebanon. He made the pillars thereof of silver, the bottom thereof of gold, the covering of it of purple, the midst thereof being paved with love, for the daughters of Jerusalem."² "And behold, a greater than Solomon is here."³

But the use of the cedars of Lebanon was not confined to the Hebrews. Heathen people cut them down, and used them more than the covenant people. On floats and in ships, with "masts"⁴ of cedar, the everlasting wood of Lebanon was transported to all the commercial cities in the world, and aided in their upbuilding. In the dominions of Hiram, king of Tyre, the cedars of Lebanon were used as much as they were in the Holy Land. And the city of the great sea was builded of this enduring wood as well as "the city of the great King."⁵

And, turning once more from the shadow to the substance, you will remark that Jesus was a useful man in His living day. He was always and everywhere about His Father's business. Early and late, in season and out of season, we see Him going about from place to place, preaching the gospel to the poor,

¹ 2 Sam. vii. 7.

² Cant. iii. 9.

³ Matt. xii. 42.

⁴ Ezek. xxvii. 5.

⁵ Ps. xlviii. 2.

teaching the ignorant, healing the sick, casting out devils, and raising the dead. He was so much engaged in these abundant labors of love that He had no Sabbath day to rest, and many of His nights were sleepless. He had hardly time to take His necessary food: "For there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat."¹ Great multitudes followed Him, and He always had compassion on them, and delivered them out of all their distresses. In the New Testament, we have four short sketches of His busy and benevolent life. Short sketches we say, because we are sure that only a small part of His sermons and miracles are recorded, as these are the last significant words of the last Gospel: "There are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written."²

But, useful as the Saviour was in His living day, He has become much more useful since He died. It is not Christ, but "Christ crucified,"³ that is the power of God unto salvation. His death was just as necessary as His birth, and accomplished much more than His life. Indeed, He was born of a set purpose that He might be able to die for the redemption of sinners. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."⁴ Himself was this corn of wheat concerning which He thus spake, — Himself the divine seed of

¹ Mark vi. 31.

² John xxi. 25.

³ 1 Cor. i. 23.

⁴ John xii 24.

that great and constantly increasing harvest of joy and peace which has been springing up ever since.

While Jesus lived He resided in the Holy Land, and with but few exceptions His personal ministry was confined to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel."¹ It is interesting to know that He never ventured beyond the border of Palestine but once, after Joseph brought the young child back from Egypt. But after His death and resurrection He enlarged His ministry. He departed from His own country that He might make the whole world His own country. In His living day when He sent out His apostles to preach He commanded them, saying, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not."² But after He died and rose again, He gave them another and a greater commission, saying, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."³ When the disciples went "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,"⁴ they returned to Jesus and reported "what they had done, and what they had taught;"⁵ but when they went out into all the world Jesus went with them and blessed their sermons to the conversion of thousands.

Before He died we read about Him going from one city to another. He is one while in Capernaum, another while in Jerusalem, and another while in Bethany. But since He rose again from the dead, He is present in every city at the same time. He was entertained by Zacchæus and Levi and Lazarus,

¹ Matt. xv. 24.

² Matt. x. 5.

³ Mark xvi. 15.

⁴ Matt. x. 6.

⁵ Mark vi. 30.

but now He is the welcome guest of every Christian man and woman in the world. The corn of wheat, by going down into the ground and dying, multiplied itself beyond all computation, and it will continue to grow and flourish till the whole world shall be covered with its harvest of grace and glory.

It was of a Friday afternoon that Christ was crucified; and His enemies, doubtless, thought that that would be the end of the matter. But "there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again."¹ And there was a better hope that this tree itself would be raised up again. And it was raised up again early in the morning of the third day. And in the very city where it was cut down it was planted over again, and right there in the coldest and hardest soil it was rooted and grounded quicker and deeper and better than ever before. And watered only with tears and blood it grew so mightily that it soon became "a Plant of Rênown." It blossomed abundantly on the day of Pentecost and every day thereafter. The sacrilegious axe of ten tyrants was laid at its root and often lifted up against it, and the very fires of hell were kindled round its trunk, but it could not be destroyed, and the measures taken to destroy it were the means of its preservation and extension. "Beginning at Jerusalem,"² its goodly cedar-like branches speedily spread out over Damascus and Antioch and Corinth and Athens and Ephesus and Rome. Before the first century passed away, there were saints in "Cæsar's household,"³ and before the third century

¹ Job xiv. 7.² Luke xxiv. 47.³ Phil. iv. 22.

passed away there was a saint on Cæsar's throne. "Behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed."¹ The "tender plant"² was such a "Tree of Life" that it could not be cut down again. The rare exotic rather flourished in the flames, and mounted higher after every martyrdom. The more it was trampled down in the dust, the more it multiplied and grew.

And, in the coming future, "the thing that hath been, it is that which shall be."³ "The stone which the builders rejected"⁴ has broken many a hammer, and it will break many more. The Tree of Life has blunted many a sharp instrument, and it will blunt many more. A hundred years ago a boasting unbeliever said, "I have gone up and down through the Christian garden of Eden, and with my simple axe I have cut down one after another of the trees, till I have scarce left a single sapling standing;" but that man and his "simple axe" have passed away to their own place "as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like a rolling thing before the whirlwind,"⁵ and "The trees of the Lord are full of sap; the cedars of Lebanon, which He hath planted."⁶ And, although at the present time there seems to be a general revival of infidelity, and men of much learning are doubting and denying the evidences of Christianity, challenging us to fight the old battle over again, saying with so much confidence, "Come, let us look one another in the face!" we would answer them and every "little

¹ Exod. iii. 2.

² Isa. liii. 2.

³ Eccl. i. 9.

⁴ Matt. xxi. 42.

⁵ Isa. xvii. 13.

⁶ Ps. civ. 16.

horn, speaking great things,"¹ in the admirable and appropriate language of Joash to Amaziah, "The thistle that was in Lebanon sent to the cedar that was in Lebanon, saying, Give thy daughter to my son to wife: and there passed by a wild beast that was in Lebanon, and trode down the thistle."²

"And trode down the thistle." Such shall ever be the expected end of every vain attempt to overturn or undermine the sure and for ever settled foundations of our holy religion. Christ is in His church and over His church and under His church and round about His church, "and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."³ "Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder."⁴

The modern scepticism is the former scepticism risen again from the dead. It is always rising again from the dead and clothing itself with new garments; and just now it seems to be putting on the robe of our elder Brother to steal away our birthright. But the unclean things will always look "like frogs,"⁵ however "clothed upon,"⁶ and the change of raiment cannot deceive a man as blind as Isaac. "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau."⁷ And in due season the stone "cut out without hands"⁸ shall smite the monster on his feet, and he shall "become like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors."⁹ "Woe unto him that striveth with his

¹ Dan. vii. 8.² 2 Chron. xxv. 18.

■ Matt. xvi. 18.

⁴ Matt. xxi. 44.

■ Rev. xvi. 13.

⁶ 2 Cor. v. 4.

■ Gen. xxvii. 22.

⁸ Dan. ii. 34.

■ Dan. ii. 35.

Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth.”¹

We entertain no fears, therefore, concerning the progress and prosperity and final triumph of the everlasting kingdom. In spite of “the boar out of the wood,”² the living vine shall live for ever; and in spite of all the blows from all the battle-axes of all “the armies of the aliens,”³ the Tree of Life shall take deeper root downward every day, and mount higher and higher, and flourish more and more, until its branches shall reach “from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth,”⁴ and all nations shall sit down under its shadow with great delight. “There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon.”⁵

Jesus, my Jehovah, remember and redeem this promise which thou hast made to me, and not to me only, but to every Israelite indeed: “I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive-tree, and his smell as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon.”⁷

¹ Isa. xlv. 9.

² Ps. lxxx. 13.

³ Heb. xi. 34.

⁴ Ps. lxxii. 8.

⁵ Ps. lxxii. 16.

■ Hos. xiv. 5-7.

HIS MOUTH.

CHAPTER XIII.

"His mouth is most sweet."

TO some there may seem a sameness betwixt this feature of the Saviour and the one in which His lips are likened to lilies "dropping sweet-smelling myrrh." The lips and mouth of our Beloved both are sweet; but this last is more, and better and sweeter than the first. The words that fall from the Saviour's lips are sweet-smelling, but His mouth is sweet-tasting, most sweet, sweetness itself, yea, sweetnesses, for so the word should be rendered; and it was selected by the Spirit to express as far as possible the most sensible and sweetest manifestations of the Saviour's love.

It is much to hear of Jesus by the hearing of the ear. It is more and better to read the holy record of His life upon earth, and to peruse the very sermons that He preached. But to be brought into His banqueting house under the banner of His best love, there to enjoy the profusion of His mercies, His caresses, His embraces, yea, and the very "kisses of His mouth,"¹ this is best of all, and this is the beautiful and blessed thought suggested by this most engaging and endearing feature of our sweet Lord Jesus.

A kiss is the sign of reconciliation. After their long and painful separation, when Jacob and Esau

¹ Cant. i. 2.

were about to meet, a sharp conflict was apprehended. The younger of the twain was actually in danger of his life by the hands of his twin-brother whom he had so wickedly wronged, and whose bloody wrath had now been nursed for more than twenty years. But, by prayers and presents, Jacob turned his brother's anger into love, "and Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him."¹

A similar instance of reconciliation occurs in the history of Joseph. You remember the heart-touching story. How the great prime-minister yearned over his brethren while he was making himself strange, and speaking roughly, telling them that they were spies; how they trembled and turned pale beneath the blows of their own guilty consciences; how bitterly they called to mind the "coat of many colors,"² and the deep pit, and the blood of the kid, and the Midianitish merchants to whom they sold their father's favorite son; nor is it strange that they looked at one another in blank astonishment, exclaiming in the bitterness of their sin, which was now coming home to torment them, constraining them to say, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother."³ But when he could refrain himself no longer, Joseph made himself known unto them, and changed their sorrow into joy: "Moreover, he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them: and after that his brethren talked with him."⁴

So, too, when the poor prodigal came creeping back from the far country to his father's house, not worthy

¹ Gen. xxxiii. 4.

² Gen. xxxvii. 23.

³ Gen. xlii. 21.

⁴ Gen. xlv. 15.

to be called a son, and hardly hoping to be made a hired servant, there was a better welcome ready for him than he expected. A father's heart went with him in all his wanderings, and a father's weeping eyes seem ever to have been watching for his return, for "when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him."¹

In like manner, we who were once afar off are brought nigh to our Heavenly Father. We had gone astray. But we were not forgotten, neither were we left to perish in our wretchedness. The three persons in the ever-blessed Trinity sat in solemn council on the great question, "How should man be just with God?"² From the perfections of the divine nature it seemed evident that without satisfaction for sin the sinner could not be saved. But infinite wisdom devised the plan of salvation, and infinite love executed the same. Jesus was substituted for the transgressors, and "in His own body on the tree"³ He suffered the punishment pronounced against them, so that for His sake His Father can forgive the sinner, and preserve His holiness as untarnished as if no sin had ever been committed. By living and dying Jesus harmonized all the conflicting attributes of the Almighty, so that God can be just and yet justify the ungodly. In Him, and in His great salvation, "mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other."⁴

¹ Luke xv. 20.

³ 1 Pet. ii. 24.

² Job ix. 2.

⁴ Ps. lxxxv. 10.

Besides, as Jesus is a personal Saviour, He must needs be the mediator of every one that believeth. He is my mediator and thine,—the Daysman who stands betwixt the individual sinner and his offended Father in heaven. He not only made salvation possible, but He placed it beyond a peradventure. Having died to reconcile His people to God, they shall surely be reconciled. They may be strangers to grace and “children of wrath.”¹ Such are all men by nature. And the best of us were and are bad enough by actual transgression.

I speak the words of truth and soberness when I say that we sold our best brother, and when He was slain with “wicked hands”² our sins were the cruel nails that fastened Him to the tree. But though we treated Him so despitefully and crucified Him on Calvary, and though we have crucified Him afresh every day since we were born, and have lived only to trample His precious blood under our polluted feet, He cannot give us up, He will not let us go to our own place in hell; but comes to seek and find us, and, subduing the enmity within us by His grace, He reconciles us unto Himself with the sweetest kisses of His mouth.

A kiss is the token of affection. From the beginning of the world until now it has been regarded as love’s own peculiar and appropriate sign. It is something more than a mere sign. It speaks a language all its own, and is confessedly the best expression of the emotions of the heart that is “sick of love.”³ I

¹ Eph. ii. 3.

² Acts ii. 23.

³ Cant. ii. 5.

suppose no two persons ever loved each other better than David and Jonathan. They were more than friends and true yoke-fellows. Their two hearts were melted into one in the fires of the purest and deepest affection that ever existed between man and man. They were very pleasant to one another, and loved one another with a love "passing the love of women,"¹ "and they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded."²

When the Saviour was entertained at the house of a certain Pharisee, there came an unbidden guest into the banqueting hall. She did not come to the great feast, for she was not worthy to appear in the presence of such great people because she had been such a great sinner. But in some way and at some time she had met with a change of heart, and had learned to love the Lord Jesus; and, desiring to do something to show her affection for Him who had done so much for her, she crept quietly to the place where He was reclining at the table, bringing with her an alabaster box of ointment, and, standing behind Him weeping, she "began to wash His feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment."³

Confounded at the conduct of this woman, the proud Pharisee was thinking within himself that Jesus could be no prophet, or He would not permit such a notorious sinner to touch Him, when "the Holy One"⁴ on this wise constrained His host, out of his own mouth, to

¹ 2 Sam. i. 26.

³ Luke vii. 38.

² 1 Sam. xx. 41.

⁴ Hab. iii. 3.

commend the woman and condemn himself: "Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor, which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And He said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. And He turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. Mine head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore, I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little."¹

Amongst ourselves this sign of love may be only the mockery of the thing signified, as the profession of love is not all the same as the possession of it. When Naomi had her affecting interview with her daughters "Orpah kissed her mother-in-law,"² and departed, "but Ruth clave unto her." Here the cleaving was better than the kissing. And when Joab met Amasa with a smiling face, he appeared very pleasant to his companion in arms, and kindly inquired after his welfare: "Joab said unto Amasa,

¹ Luke vii. 40-47.

² Ruth i. 14.

Art thou in health, my brother? And Joab took Amasa by the beard with the right hand to kiss him."¹ But at the same time he drew his sword with the other hand, and smote his unsuspecting friend under the fifth rib, and while he was kissing him he killed him. And, sorer still, when Judas betrayed Jesus he said to the chief priests and elders: "Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is He: hold Him fast. And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, Master; and kissed him;"² prostituting love's own holy sign to the service of the devil, for which cause the common damned shun his company.

So when we kiss one another, or when we kiss the Saviour, the act may not be prompted by love unfeigned. It may wear only the appearance of affection when the heart is either empty or filled only with enmity, like some of old time, of whom it was said, "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me."³ But when Christ condescends to kiss us there can be no question concerning the sincerity of the act. The Master means something when He stoops to take our hand in His, and when He presses His lips to ours. He means more than the mind of man can conceive, but nothing more than the humblest Christian may experience, as it is written: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit."⁴

¹ 2 Sam. xx. 9.

² Matt. xv. 8.

³ Matt. xxvi. 48, 49.

⁴ 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10.

A kiss is the emblem of espousals. In the early world kisses were not so common as they are now; and as they were more rare, so they were more sweet and sacred; nor is it strange that in the apostolic age the saints were entreated to "greet one another with an holy kiss,"¹ and "a kiss of charity."² They were so kindly affectioned one toward another, and loved one another so sincerely, and possessed so much of "the simplicity that is in Christ,"³ that whenever they met they saluted one another with a kiss. And often in the New Testament this pleasant custom is encouraged and commended.

Paul's parting interview with the elders of the church of Ephesus is, perhaps, the best illustration of this custom which was so common among the primitive Christians. The scene is beautifully touching beyond all telling. The vessel in which he was a passenger was riding at anchor in the bay of Miletus, and the little life-boat was beached, and waiting to take the apostle back on board as soon as possible. The elders are all come to look with sorrow for the last time upon the face of their first and most devoted pastor. And, standing beneath the open sky perhaps their "beloved brother Paul"⁴ is speaking to them "good words and comfortable words" abundantly baptized with the tenderness of tears. His great heart is stirred within him as he briefly reviews the three years of his weeping and rejoicing ministry among them. And, after commending them "to

¹ 2 Cor. xiii. 12.

³ 2 Cor. xi. 3.

² 1 Pet. v. 14.

⁴ 2 Pet. iii. 15.

God, and to the word of His grace,"¹ "he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him."²

But there was a time when a kiss was seldom given and received except by lovers, and not by them till the time of their betrothal, and as the token of their espousals, after which the twain were permitted to pass the period of their engagement in each other's society. And shall it be counted a strange thing if our Beloved shall give us this pleasantest token of His love when He enters into covenant with us? The strange thing would rather be if He did not manifest His loving-kindness in every proper and possible way, not only when the covenant is sealed, but also every time He comes to make us a visit, and especially when He renews the engagement in the sacramental supper.

During these seasons, so rich in blessing, what glorious visions we have seen of Jesus! What sweet communion we have had with Jesus! While the King was sitting at His table, how often have we had Mary's sweet place at His feet when the feast commenced! How often have we had John's sweeter place on His bosom as the feast continued! And, before it closed, how often have we been lifted higher to the Bride's sweetest place on His lips! And, closely clasping our arms of faith and love around His neck, how often have we cried out, without fear or shame, "Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth: for thy love is better than wine!"³ And how

¹ Acts xx. 32.

² Acts xx. 36, 37.

³ Cant. i. 2.

often have we heard Him saying, in return: "How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! how much better is thy love than wine! and the smell of thine ointments than all spices! Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb: honey and milk are under thy tongue; and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon."¹ And at last, when the sweet solemnities were over and ended, and we were coming down from the holy mount, how often have we lingered and looked back, that we might "behold the beauty of the Lord"² a little longer, if we might not dwell in His house all the days of our lives!

By such sweet communion with Christ we may enjoy a present heaven; and if only our communion were uninterrupted we might enjoy a perpetual heaven; and if only it were intimate and endearing enough we might enjoy a perfect heaven. When our Beloved comes to make us a visit, or to abide with us, which is far better, He brings heaven with Him, and sitting at His feet like Mary, or leaning on His breast like John, or enjoying the kisses of His mouth like the spouse, seems better worth to us than the harp of gold and the crown of glory.

The mind in which Jesus dwells is one of the many mansions of our father's house, and the heart where Jesus is enthroned is the first heaven; and the third heaven to which Paul was caught up, though something higher, can hardly be much happier. If we may speak so, it is only the upper story of the present house of our pilgrimage. "The strait gate"³ is one

¹ Cant. iv. 10, 11.

² Ps. xxvii. 4.

³ Matt. vii. 13.

of the "everlasting doors;"¹ the narrow way is a golden street of the New Jerusalem; and the sweet presence of Jesus is the beginning of the beatific vision. And when together we get up early to visit the vineyards, to "see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth,"² our "garden enclosed"³ seems like the life-watered paradise.

In this present evil world there are regions of bliss that may be reached by every Christian. There are lands of Beulah where the air is very sweet and pleasant, and the sun is always shining, and the birds are ever singing. There are high mountains apart where, dwelling with Jesus, we are already in heaven. Wherever it may be, and whatever it may be, heaven would not be worth having without Jesus, and earth is better than Eden ever was, just because Jesus is here: "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."⁴

My dear, sweet Jesus is the delight of my life, and the life of my delights. His smiling face is the sunshine of my heart, and His near presence makes me happy all the day long and all the year round; and, when waking in the watches of the night, "my meditation of Him shall be sweet."⁵

And when, for reasons all my own, He withdraws Himself from me, and is gone, the sun of my soul suffers an eclipse, and in my darkness and loneliness and coldness I can only find peace in praying for His

¹ Ps. xxiv. 7.

² Cant. vii. 12.

³ Cant. iv. 12.

⁴ Rom. v. 20.

⁵ Ps. civ. 34.

return. "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks,"¹ so panteth my soul after Jesus. I pine for Jesus, as the turtle-dove pines for her absent mate. I long for Jesus, as one longs for an absent lover: "My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning."² And when at last He comes, "leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills,"³ my Lord, my Life, my Light, my Love, my bounding heart is like to break for gladness. "Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, turn, my Beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bethel."⁴

We talk too much about going up to heaven, and too little about heaven coming down to us. In our journey thither the "better country" meets us more than half way. I ask earnestly, Are there not "days of heaven upon the earth"?⁵ And have we not seen segments of the everlasting Sabbath touching the sanctuary like tangents? And are there not "heavenly places"⁶ upon earth, where we have been permitted to sit together, whether in the body or out of the body we could scarcely tell? And have we not often satisfied the craving hunger of our hearts with "angel's food,"⁷ and the "bread of heaven,"⁸ and the "true bread from heaven,"⁹ all of which were placed upon our wilderness wayfaring table by the hands of our Beloved?

¹ Ps. xlii. 1.² Ps. cxxx. 6.³ Cant. ii. 8.⁴ Cant. ii. 17.⁵ Deut. xi. 21.⁶ Eph. ii. 6.⁷ Ps. lxxviii. 25.⁸ Ps. cv. 40.⁹ John vi. 32.

And if we are in Christ Jesus, are we not in heaven now? Yes, we are, as truly as we ever will be. Our moving shelter-tent is often pitched in glory's vestibule, and we nightly lodge in the lower story of the "house not made with hands."¹ "Ye ARE come," — not ye shall come, not ye are coming. But these are the blessed words, — let me repeat them once more, — "Ye ARE come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel."²

There are other pleasures in the world, but none are half so sweet as loving Jesus and serving Him for love. The hardest yoke is easy when lined with the soft silk velvet of His love, and the heaviest burden is light when carried by His all-sufficient grace. His approving smile brightens the darkest day; His pleasant voice stills the stormiest sea; His real presence changes the worst fortune into the best fortune, heals all the bitter waters along our desert path, and melts the wildest winter weather into the sweet season of spring. Down is up, poverty is wealth, sorrow is joy, and death is life everlasting when Jesus comes to kiss our tears away. "As dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor,

¹ 2 Cor. v. 1.² Heb. xii. 22-24.

yet making many rich ; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.”¹

When Jacob fell in love with Rachel, she was “beautiful and well-favored ;”² and he said to Laban, “I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter.”³ This manly offer was at once accepted. “And Jacob served seven years for Rachel ; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.”⁴ His service was hard, as he tells us himself. “In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night ; and my sleep departed from mine eyes.”⁵ It was also a long service. Seven years ! How very long it seems when looking ahead and waiting for the dawning of the marriage day ; and twice seven years seems for ever and for ever ! But this hard and long service was a service of love, and so it was both easy and short. Jacob’s light heart lightened the labor of his hands, and his best love gave “wings like a dove”⁶ to the lazy leaden hours, and they fled so swiftly by that the long and weary years seemed but a few bright and blessed days.

Besides, during all this period of patient or impatient waiting, Jacob enjoyed the pleasant society of his betrothed. They dwelt together in the same house, and gathered daily round the same family altar ; and, as Rachel doubtless continued to herd some of her father’s sheep, Jacob’s flocks were mostly to be found feeding in the same green pastures ; and the twain often sat down side by side under the

¹ 2 Cor. vi. 9, 10.

² Gen. xxix. 17.

³ Gen. xxix. 18.

⁴ Gen. xxix. 20.

⁵ Gen. xxxi. 40.

⁶ Ps. lv. 6.

shadow of the same great rock at noon ; and when it was toward evening they might be seen, both of them together, bringing their flocks round the same well of water where they first met, and where " Jacob kissed Rachel." ¹ So the pleasant associations and anticipations made Jacob's toil more and more a labor of love, light and delightful, and so the long, long time of their espousals passed sweetly and speedily away.

And, charmed by the constant companionship and communion of Christ, no toil will be counted wearisome, no burden will be too heavy to be borne, no time will seem too long. We are ready for any thing and every thing, "for the love of Christ constraineth us." ² There is a joy in every sorrow, a light in every darkness, a delight in every duty, and a crown in every cross, when we are working for Jesus, or suffering for Jesus, or walking with Jesus in the way of self-denial.

Always and everywhere, in sickness and in health, in adversity and prosperity, when bearing "the burden and heat of the day," ³ and the frost by night, in His service there is only pleasure, and we may entertain the flying hours of toil and suffering with this song for all seasons : "As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, so is my Beloved among the sons. I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste." ⁴

¹ Gen. xxix. 11.

³ Matt. xx. 12.

² 2 Cor. v. 14.

⁴ Cant. ii. 3.

JESUS, MY GOD, MY HEAVEN, MY HOME, MY DEAREST, SWEETEST, KINDEST FRIEND: Make haste and come down from thy sapphire throne, and kiss me with the kisses of thy mouth, for thy mouth is most sweet, and thy love is better than wine. Be not any longer like a wayfaring man who turns aside to tarry only for a night; but come and abide with me, making my heart thy heaven, and the earnest of my own. Let it please thee to bring me into thy banqueting house under the banner of thy love, and stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples, for I am sick of love. Awake, O north wind, and come thou south, blow upon my garden that the spices thereof may flow out, let my Beloved come into His garden and eat His pleasant fruits. Oh, let not my Lord be angry, and I will speak: Come, my Beloved, and let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages, there will I give thee my loves. Oh that thou wert as my brother nourished in the bosom of my mother! when I should find thee without, I would kiss thee; yet I should not be despised. Oh, let not my dearest Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Make haste, my Beloved, and be thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices.

HIS LOVELINESS.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Yea, He is altogether lovely."

LIKE one running in a race, we are almost out of breath, not because we are wearied with our "work of faith, and labor of love,"¹ but rather because of the exceeding delicacy and difficulty of our delightful subject. All along the shining way of our sweet meditations of Jesus, we have increasingly felt that we were treading on holy ground, and we have had a care to advance circumspectly, and with becoming reverence, as we trust, lest at any time we should touch the ark of God with one unhallowed thought. But now we are coming to the holiest place of all. We are coming to the highest heaven of our heavenly theme, here with open face to gaze upon "Him that dwelt in the bush,"² and whose terrestrial and celestial beauty and glory the angel Gabriel could not depict, nor Michael the archangel, "which things the angels desire to look into."³ "I heard also the noise of the wings of the living creatures that touched one another, and the noise of the wheels over against them, and a noise of a great rushing."⁴

But, although this most interesting part of our fascinating theme far transcends our highest thoughts,

¹ 1 Thess. i. 3.

² Deut. xxxiii. 16.

³ 1 Pet. i. 12.

⁴ Ezek. iii. 13.

and though we cannot hope to do it justice, we may come modestly behind our Saviour, and through the press of His perfections touch "the hem of his garment,"¹ and, perhaps, by gathering together His graces and glories, which are scattered through the Scriptures like stars in the sky, we may help ourselves and others also to see and admire and adore what we cannot express with our weak words, and what the heart of man cannot conceive. If we could describe the Saviour in all the beauty of His loveliness, He would not be such a Saviour as He is ; and our failure to set Him forth will be our success. We shall think all the more of Him, because He is so far above our highest conceptions, clothed with light and majesty like a garment, crowned "with glory and honor,"² and "dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto."³

As the "unspeakable words" of the Apostle Paul, "which it is not lawful for a man to utter,"⁴ are a better description of the New Jerusalem than the jasper walls, and the pearly gates, and the golden streets of the Apostle John ; as the perfect silence of the one who "was caught up into Paradise," and saw what He would not make the vain attempt to describe, is more significant than the gorgeous imagery of the other, who saw heaven only in a vision, and from far-off Patmos,—so the Lamb, who is the light of that place, seems much more glorious in the incomprehensible mystery of His unapproachable majesty, and

¹ Matt. ix. 20.

³ 1 Tim. vi. 16.

² Ps. viii. 5.

⁴ 2 Cor. xii. 4.

if we should leave the text without a single remark, silently to speak for itself, it would suggest more than enough for our meditation in this world and that which is to come.

Indeed, the text seems to be a confession of failure by the one who wrote it. And so far as we are concerned it is an honest confession of failure. From the beginning of our book until now, we have been striving to answer the question, "What is thy Beloved more than another beloved?"¹ And following closely His most prominent features as they are sketched by the inspired penman, and dwelling with pleasure upon the profusion of beautiful objects to which they are likened, we have pointed out the exceeding excellency of each one in particular. But disappointed at the result, and dissatisfied with our inability to comprehend His indescribable blessedness, what shall we more say? What can we more say than this, "Yea, He is altogether lovely"?²

Jesus is lovely, as we have seen in part, in His every several lineament: each separate feature is perfect. But, behold, now "how great is the sum of them,"³ and how surpassingly glorious is their comingling splendor! "My Beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand. His head is as the most fine gold, His locks are bushy, and black as a raven. His eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set. His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers: His lips like lilies, dropping sweet-smelling myrrh. His hands

¹ Cant. v. 9.² Cant. v. 16.³ Ps. cxxxix. 17.

are as gold rings set with the beryl: His belly is as bright ivory overlaid with sapphires. His legs are as pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold: His countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars. His mouth is most sweet: yea, He is altogether lovely."¹

It remains for us reverently to consider this last feature of our Lord Jesus, which seems to be the gathering together of all that has been said. It is the finest as well as the final stroke of the inspired pencil by which the divine image is rendered more luminous, more life-like, and "altogether lovely."

Jesus is altogether lovely in His personal appearance. This whole precious passage of Scripture which has been passing under review is the best description of the Saviour as He appeared in this world and as He is now and ever will be world without end. We might almost say without controversy that it is the only description which we have of the man Christ Jesus, as He came from heaven asking for the heart and the hand of humanity. Though no representation of the Saviour was ever made during His life upon earth, it may be remarked that His traditional features resemble very much those which we have been considering. It can scarcely be counted a strange thing that no likeness of our Lord was taken by those who saw Him in the flesh, because the mind of man is so prone to idolatry that the image might have become the object of adoration. If His people worshipped "the brazen serpent,"² which was only

¹ Cant. v. 10-16.

² 2 Kings xviii. 4.

His emblem, how much more would they have worshipped His very image.

Besides, had it been possible to paint the Saviour's face or model it in marble, the jealous commandment, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath,"¹ seems to forbid the making of any representation of Him who was God as well as man. Nevertheless we have often wondered why none of the evangelists have so much as attempted to sketch their Master's personal appearance. They saw Him, and they saw His glory and were "eye-witnesses of His majesty;"² but what like He was, or what like "His glory" was, they have not told us. But, as they wrote "as they were moved by the Holy Ghost,"³ we will not marvel any more at their significant silence, especially as the ideal of the adoring mind is better every way than any likeness that could have been made.

But, though we have no representation of the Saviour's personal appearance, we do not need any, fondly believing as we do that the Divine original of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments must have been the most beautiful of the sons of men. The shadows cast before betokened the beauty of the coming man whose shadows they were. The Priest without blemish — having eyes without blemish, and hands without blemish, and feet without blemish, and a form without blemish — was an interesting type of the Great High Priest. "A blind man,"⁴ or one

¹ Exod. xx. 4.

² 2 Pet. i. 16.

³ 2 Pet. i. 21.

⁴ Lev. xxi. 18.

"blemished in his eye" could not prefigure Him whose "eyes are as the eyes of doves," nor could "a lame" man be consecrated to represent Him whose "legs are as pillars of marble," nor could "a broken-handed man" be taken as the image of Him whose "hands are as gold rings," nor could "a dwarf"¹ become the shadow of Him whose "stature is as Lebanon."

The entrance to the priesthood was through the door of physical perfection, and this statute was inscribed on the door-posts: "No man that hath a blemish of the seed of Aaron the priest shall come nigh to offer the offerings of the Lord made by fire: he hath a blemish; he shall not come nigh to offer the bread of his God. He shall eat the bread of his God, both of the most holy, and of the holy. Only he shall not go in unto the vail, nor come nigh unto the altar, because he hath a blemish; that he profane not my sanctuaries: for I the Lord do sanctify them."²

Moreover the victim must needs be as physically perfect as the priest, and for the same reason, because it foreshadowed the great sacrifice of the Saviour when He poured out His blood for our salvation. The "Lamb without blemish," the "bullock without blemish," and the "red heifer without blemish," were better emblems of the coming Saviour, just because they were without blemish. And before any offering could be laid on the altar it was carefully examined, lest any thing blind or lame or maimed should be

¹ Lev. xxi. 20.

² Lev. xxi. 21-23.

slain as the shadow of the Saviour. In the law no statute is plainer, none is so frequently repeated, as this: "Ye shall offer at your own will a male without blemish, of the beeves, of the sheep, or of the goats. But whatsoever hath a blemish, that shall ye not offer: for it shall not be acceptable for you. And whosoever offereth a sacrifice of peace offerings unto the Lord to accomplish his vow, or a freewill offering in beeves or sheep, it shall be perfect to be accepted; there shall be no blemish therein." ¹

Now it is evident enough that the perfect priest and the perfect offering were intended to prefigure our perfect Saviour and His perfect sacrifice. As our Priest, "from the sole of His foot even to the crown of His head, there was no blemish in Him." ² And as our offering He was as "a Lamb without blemish and without spot." ³ In the lowest and most literal sense, therefore, as well as in the highest and most spiritual, Jesus was a perfect man, and in every way in which the words can be understood "He is altogether lovely." In form and features and manners, "He is altogether lovely." Surely the "express image" of the Father's person must be "the perfection of beauty," ⁴ and if only we are His, as such we shall one day see Him fairer than all His fellows.

It is rather remarkable that we are indebted to the Old Testament writers for most of the suggestive hints which we have received concerning the personal appearance of our Beloved Jesus. Those who had

¹ Lev. xxii. 19-21.

² 2 Sam. xiv. 25.

³ 1 Pet. i. 19.

⁴ Ps. l. 2.

the near view of the Saviour, and "beheld His glory,"¹ are almost, if not altogether, silent on this subject; whilst those who saw Him afar off seem to have had no greater joy than in striving to give expression to their views. The apostles would not speak of that which was unspeakable; but the prophets, who caught only faint glimpses of the coming man, have given us the impression that His appearance made upon their minds.

Like one whose heart is ravished with the sight of his eyes, Zechariah exclaims, "How great is His beauty!"² And, as if he beheld nothing else in the land of the Lamb but "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all,"³ Isaiah breaks out in this precious promise, "Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty."⁴ Looking up into His beatific face, beaming with brightness beyond all telling, David says, "Thou art fairer than the children of men."⁵ And, after gathering together these emblems on which we have been dwelling with so much delight, — the white and ruddy complexion; the most fine gold; the raven locks; the eyes of doves; the flower-beds; the lilies dropping myrrh; the gold rings; the white ivory, overlaid with sapphires; the pillars of marble; the glory of Lebanon; and the sweetest kisses, — and finding their combined splendor far too dim fitly to represent "Jesus the Gem of Beauty," Solomon sets them all aside, saying, "Yea, He is altogether lovely."

"It is surely no light thing that the Christian

¹ John i. 14.

² Zech. ix. 17.

³ Eph. i. 23.

⁴ Isa. xxxiii. 17.

⁵ Ps. xlv. 2.

world, in its universal tradition of half a hundred generations, has piously and intimately believed that the second Adam, like the first, bore the outward signatures of God's perfect hand. It is not without some deep reason, dwelling in universal belief among those countless things which, if written, should have filled the whole world with Scriptures, or in the intuitions of the Spirit, or in the instincts of love, or in the self-evident harmonies of God's works,—it is not, I say, without some or all of these reasons, that the world has believed that prophets, psalmists, and seers knew what they spake, and spake what they beheld. It is a pardonable fault to take them in the letter of their words, and a harmless error to go astray with the belief of Christendom. We shall not be dangerously out of the way, if we lovingly and humbly believe that He who is the brightness of His Father's glory, and the express image of His person, did take unto Himself our manhood, as His revealed presence for ever, in its most perfect image and likeness; that where two natures were united, as both were perfect, so both were beautiful. I know not what he may be to whom such a thought is not blessed. We bear witness to it by the fond, blind way in which we invest all we love with beauty. Even the least comely and ill-favored are lovely to those that love them. Our minds are full of lights and hues, with which we array the objects of our hearts. Let each do as he will. Only let us first love Him, and then weigh these thoughts. Till then it is all too soon.' ¹

¹ Manning's Sermons, vol. iii. p. 315.

Jesus is altogether lovely in His personal character. His body, mind, and spirit were all without blemish, and He never sinned in thought or word or deed. He preached and practised the purest system of morality that was ever commended to mankind. And His own self was the best commentary upon His own Sermon on the Mount. Those divine precepts which He brought direct from heaven were perfectly exemplified in His holy living. The law of kindness dwelt upon His tongue, and there was no guile in His mouth. His feet never wandered from the right way, His hands never did any thing that was wrong, and He never entertained one vain thought. At the close of every day He could set His conduct on the square of His own golden rule. He loved His enemies, and prayed for those who persecuted Him. He gave His "back to the smiters," and His "cheeks to them that plucked off the hair,"¹ and when He was reviled He "reviled not again."² He loved God with all His heart and His neighbor as Himself, and lived and toiled and died, if by any means He might make bad men good, and good men better, and all men holy. He was the living law of God, and in the immaculate purity of His human character He has shown that the divine law is only another name for the divine love.

Jesus was the All-good, the All-fair, and the All-holy: "The way, the truth, and the life."³ He was the light and the love of God, and the light and the love of men. There was a perfect agreement betwixt

¹ Isa. 1. 6.

² 1 Pet. ii. 23.

³ John xiv. 6.

His outer and inner man, and in every thing they harmonized completely. He had no need to keep His body under, for it was just as holy as the Divinity that dwelt therein. And in all His deportment He was distinguished for "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report."¹ He was altogether lovely in every bodily feature, in every mental attribute, and in every moral quality. Humanity in its highest degree of development was seen in Him, and in Him only, because in Him dwelt "all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."² There was nothing in Him that was not lovely, and there was nothing lovely that was not in Him. He was the beginning and the end of all perfection.

He was a man of prayer, and always felt His need of help from heaven to support Him in His "labors more abundant,"³ and to comfort Him in all His tribulations, for He was "a man of sorrows."⁴ Himself was the mercy-seat, and He had no need to go to "the throne of grace," for He was always there. But there was "a solitary place"⁵ on the Mount of Olives, which might be called His closet; for He "oft-times resorted thither"⁶ to commune with His heavenly Father, and sometimes He spent the whole night in prayer. He prayed earnestly and always. The holy fire from heaven, burning ever on the holy altar of His heart, consumed the holy temple of His body, as it

¹ Phil. iv. 8.

² Col. ii. 9.

³ 2 Cor. xi. 23.

⁴ Isa. liii. 3.

⁵ Mark i 35.

⁶ John xviii. 2.

was written of Him, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up."¹ But, though He prayed so fervently for Himself, it is worthy of the most special remark that He never made any confession of sin. He made no confession of sin, because He had no sins to confess. No, not one. In the model prayer He has taught us to say, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors;"² but He never offered this petition. In His life there was one sorrow of which He knew nothing by personal experience, and that was sorrow for personal sin. He was never guilty of the smallest transgression, and had no need of repentance.

No man was ever subjected to so many and such exasperating provocations as Jesus, yet He never lost His temper. He never had any temper to lose. As our Priest, as our Offering, as our Altar, as our Example, He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners."³ He was born of a woman, "yet without sin." He was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, "yet without sin." He was brought up in a town of bad repute, "yet without sin." He was a man of like passions as we are, "yet without sin." He was in all points tempted like as we are, "yet without sin."⁴ Day by day He met with wicked men and often with the angels of the devil, and sometimes with the devil himself; yet He was untouched by any of them, and acknowledged by them all to be "the Holy One of God."⁵ His hands were clean, His heart was pure, and He was altogether lovely.

¹ John ii. 17.² Matt. vi. 12.³ Heb. vii. 26.⁴ Heb. iv. 15.⁵ Mark i. 24.

In men of high and low degree it often comes to pass that some one physical or mental or moral quality shoots above the rest, and so overshadows them that they grow pale and wither away. Samson was strong in body, but very feeble-minded. Paul's bodily presence was weak, but his mental power was exceeding great. And in all Israel there was none to be so much praised for his personal beauty as Absalom, neither was there any to be so much blamed for his moral deformity. Peter was the most honorable and the bravest of the twelve apostles, and at the same time he was the meanest and most cowardly. "Thou shalt never wash my feet,"¹ he said to Jesus; and, immediately swinging over to the other extreme, he exclaimed, "Not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." He went into the garden to watch with the Saviour during the long-looked-for hour of His agony, but the watchman fell asleep three times within that one hour. When Jesus was arrested, just like himself Peter rushed to the rescue of his Master, "and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear;"² and immediately after this outburst of bravery, when Jesus was led away, "Peter followed Him afar off."³ "Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended,"⁴ Peter said, and in a very little while, when the Saviour's enemies were gathered round a fire of coals to warm themselves, "Peter stood with them, and warmed himself."⁵ Speaking more vehemently, Peter ex-

¹ John xiii. 8.

² Matt. xxvi. 51.

■ Mark xiv. 54.

⁴ Matt. xxvi. 33.

⁵ John xviii. 18.

claimed, "If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise,"¹ yet, before the dawning of the day, he denied the Saviour three times, and the last time "he began to curse and to swear,"² just like himself. He was girded with a sword, like a good soldier; but he feared and quailed and fell before a servant girl. He had two names which seem appropriate to his two natures. The one was Simon, and Simon was "unstable as water;"³ the other was Peter, and Peter was unmovable as the rock. Like Ephraim, he was "a cake not turned"⁴ till the day of Pentecost was fully come, then his Simon side being turned to the fire from heaven was speedily baked like the other, and, though not without fault, henceforth he was only Peter.

But in the absolutely pure and perfect character of our Lord the opposing virtues meet together and embrace each other. His "whole spirit and soul and body"⁵ were all in perfect harmony. The beauties of His holiness and the beauties of His loveliness were exactly equal to one another, and so poised in the balance that no one attribute weighed the most or shined the brightest. He was as wise as a serpent and as harmless as a dove. "His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers: His countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars." The sweetness is all majesty, and the majesty is all sweetness, and they are both alike beautiful and good. He is mighty and merciful, and His pity is set over against His power

¹ Mark xiv. 31.² Mark xiv. 71.³ Gen. xlix. 4.⁴ Hos. vii. 8.⁵ 1 Thess. v. 23.

to melt it into almighty love. He is "the Lion of the tribe of Juda,"¹ and "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."²

Before the Saviour came, the heroic virtues were almost worshipped, and the milder ones were despised, and men were taught how to repress those tender sensibilities which they could not eradicate. But the Perfect Man permitted all the emotions to have free course, and in Him they were all glorified together. He was mild as "the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain."³ And His tender heart was sometimes so touched with sympathy for the sorrowful, that the tears came running down His cheeks like rivers. Yes, "Jesus wept."⁴ We love to read these blessed words, because they open such a wide door into the great and gentle heart of our dear Lord. Tinctured with the prevailing pagan philosophy, and thinking it unbecoming in the Son of God to weep, some of the early Christians actually blotted this little text from their Testaments. But we are thankful that it was soon restored again to its own place, to teach the exceeding tenderness of Christ as nothing else can do.

And even now, in the world and in the church, there are many who have no respect for the passive virtues, and would crush out the tender emotions if they could. Seeing a strong man weeping on a certain occasion, we attempted to comfort him; but he was ashamed of his tears, and as he wiped them away

¹ Rev. v. 5.

³ 2 Sam. xxiii. 4.

² John i. 29.

⁴ John xi. 35.

he said, "I got this weakness from my mother." He counted it unmanly to weep, and a weakness that he inherited from his mother. But it is not unmanly to weep; and we are so constituted that our poor hearts would often break "with overmuch sorrow,"¹ if they could not find relief through our eyes. And, since Jesus wept, human tears seem like heavenly things. However they may be regarded by us, we are quite sure that the Saviour sets great store by them.

We are tempted to think sometimes that our eyes are blinded with unbidden tears, when the truth is that tears are never unbidden; for Jesus bids them flow. Neither are they blinding in their influence, but contrariwise they are the holy water with which Jesus washes our eyes that we may see clearer. He makes a telescope of them that we may see farther; for tears are lenses of the greatest magnifying power when looking heavenward, and aid our feeble faith in "seeing Him who is invisible."² And when they have done their needful work they are neither wiped away nor lost, but treasured up beyond the sky, like pearls and precious things for us in that day when Jesus shall make up His jewels. "Put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?"³

The altogether lovely Saviour manifested these milder virtues under the most trying circumstances. He was misunderstood, He was misrepresented, He was set at naught, He was bound, He was blindfolded, He was buffeted, He was mocked, He was scourged, He was spit upon, He was slain; yet He

¹ 2 Cor. ii. 7.

² Heb. xi. 27.

³ Ps. lvi. 8.

never murmured. His lot was hard, and it grew harder every day; but He endured it patiently and without complaining. Having "more than twelve legions of angels"¹ ready to do His bidding, and possessing in Himself all power in heaven and earth, He quietly submitted to the will of the wickedest men in the world, and suffered and died in silence for His murderers. "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth."² And, according to His own express command, the first offer of His great salvation was made to the bloody men by whom He was crucified. Thinking, perhaps, that after what had happened in Jerusalem the apostles might shake off the dust from their feet against the wicked city, and go elsewhere with the gospel, Jesus Himself appeared among them the same evening of His resurrection, and reminded them that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, "beginning at Jerusalem."³ The natural sublimity of Lebanon is nothing, and less than nothing, in comparison of the moral sublimity of Jesus.

There can be no question but that this world is changed since the Saviour came into it. It was a bad world once, and it is bad enough yet; but it is not so bad as it was before the advent, our enemies themselves being judges. It was a dark world once. It was covered with "gross darkness,"⁴ and the shadow

¹ Matt. xxvi. 53.

³ Luke xxiv. 47.

² Isa. liii. 7.

⁴ Isa. lx. 2.

of death ; but a great light has shined round about it "above the brightness of the sun."¹ The very Sun of righteousness has risen over it "with healing in his wings,"² and the darkness is disappearing, and a sense of betterment is everywhere apparent. And this sense of betterment shall grow better, and the darkness shall grow brighter, just because Jesus lived in this world, and laid down His life for it. Long ago He went away home again to heaven ; but the light of His countenance still lingers on the face of the globe, like the glory that shined on the face of Moses when he came down from the mount, and it will grow brighter and more beautiful, till like Himself it shall be altogether lovely.

We are accustomed to say that Christ came from heaven, but when He came He brought heaven with Him. When He was born in Bethlehem, heaven overflowed and emptied its choicest treasure on the earth, its pearl of great price. "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift."³ It overflowed again immediately. The celestial choir came down and sung a new song, "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."⁴ It overflowed again on the day of Pentecost. "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting."⁵ It has been overflowing ever since with seasons of

¹ Acts xxvi. 13.

² Mal. iv. 2.

³ 2 Cor. ix. 15.

⁴ Luke ii. 13, 14.

⁵ Acts ii. 2.

refreshing "from the presence of the Lord."¹ And it will continue to overflow more and more with peace and good-will toward men, until the thorn and the thistle and the trail of the old serpent, and every remnant of the curse, shall be swept clean away, and the whole world shall be redeemed and renovated, and filled with a righteous and regenerated family. One equal temperature shall spread from pole to pole; and, before the balmy atmosphere of Paradise regained, the storms and plagues and summer's heat and winter's cold shall disappear: "Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God."² "Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days."³ "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."⁴ "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof."⁵ "There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as

¹ Acts iii. 19.

² Rom. viii. 21.

³ Isa. xxx. 26.

⁴ Isa. xxxv. 10.

⁵ Zech. viii. 4, 5.

the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands."¹
 "And the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick : the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity."²

Jesus was always altogether lovely. Before He came down from heaven to earth, to join our lowly nature to His exalted own, He was altogether lovely ; for He was God over all and all over glorious. Before there was any beginning of any thing, even from everlasting, He shared the Father's eternal blessedness. "Then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him : and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him."³ But His Father and His Father's house, and His Father's blessedness and His own, were all forsaken ; but they were not forgotten. In that long prayer that He offered up in the guest-chamber, — that loveliest prayer that ever ascended as incense to the skies, — these former things are remembered after this manner, "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."⁴

But when the Saviour exchanged that better country for this bad country ; when He gave up the joys of heaven for the sorrows of earth ; when He laid aside His "crown of glory" and received the "crown of thorns ;" when He left the "great white throne"⁵ for the cross with its shame and its suffering, — the mighty condescension was made so gracefully, and

¹ Isa. lxv. 20, 22.² Isa. xxxiii. 24.³ Prov. viii. 30.⁴ John xvii. 5.⁵ Rev. xx. 11.

the altered situation was accepted with such a lovely spirit, that He actually seemed to be going up higher at every downward step in the path of His humiliation. The stable in which He was born, the humble cottage in which He resided, and the cursed tree on which He was lifted up to the death of malediction, were the first and second and third stories of His Father's house. And the wilderness where He was tempted, and Gethsemane where He sweat blood, and the "new sepulchre"¹ in which He was buried, were among the most splendid of its "many mansions."² His life was all alike beautiful, from the beginning in Bethlehem to the end on Calvary, and all along His sorrowful and shining way I can hear Him saying, "Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God."

Jesus was altogether lovely from the beginning of His earthly existence, for He came into the world without sin. His human nature was always absolutely pure and perfect. His body was prepared for Him by a special interposition of the Holy Spirit; and from such a source it is evident enough that nothing impure or imperfect could have proceeded. "That holy thing,"³ as He was called by the angel, was not shapen in iniquity as we were. He was free from the smallest stain or taint of original corruption, and He was just as free from any actual transgression. He was never born again; He never met with a change of heart. He was never converted. The holiest and highest saints in heaven were once sin-

¹ John xix. 41.

² John xiv. 2.

³ Luke i. 35.

ners on the earth. "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."¹ But the Saviour's robes were never washed. They never needed washing, because they were always clean and white, and pure and undefiled.

Jesus was altogether lovely in His helpless infancy. "That holy thing" which was born of the Virgin Mary was the holy seed of that celestial flower, the "Holy Child Jesus,"² and the "tender plant"³ was a "Plant of Renown."⁴ "The Rose of Sharon"⁵ blossomed early and with a beauty so divine that it attracted the attention of heaven and earth. An angel brought the "good tidings of great joy"⁶ to the shepherds as they watched their flocks by night. A new star shined in the sky to guide the "wise men from the east"⁷ to the place in the city of David where they would find the Saviour: "And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary His mother, and fell down, and worshipped Him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."⁸ The two worlds met in the manger; and angels and men, Jews and Gentiles, bowed down before the new-born babe of Bethlehem.

Jesus was altogether lovely when, according to the law under which He was born, He received His beautiful name. In our infancy, when we received our

¹ Rev. vii. 14.

⁴ Ezek. xxxiv. 29.

⁷ Matt. ii. 1.

² Acts iv. 27.

⁵ Cant. ii. 1.

⁸ Matt. ii. 11.

³ Isa. liii. 2.

⁶ Luke ii. 10.

Christian name, our parents informed the officiating minister by what name they would have us called. And this is the usual custom. But the Babe of Bethlehem was not named by His parents : His name like Himself came from heaven. An angel brought it down in this special message to Joseph and Mary both, "Thou shalt call His name Jesus."¹ The very sound of this name is sweet, but its signification is much more sweet. And its meaning is the real reason why it was given to the Son of Mary, "Thou shalt call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins."²

Jesus, thy name to me is balm and better every way than the balm of Gilead, because it heals the hurt in the heart, soothes the wounded spirit, and calms the troubled mind. It is life and light and love and peace, and "joy unspeakable and full of glory."³ It is more refreshing than the wells of Elim and "the dew of Hermon,"⁴ and pleasanter and far more cheering than "the wine of Lebanon,"⁵ "that goeth down sweetly, causing the lips of those that are asleep to speak."⁶ It is "an alabaster box of very precious ointment"⁷ that never can be broken and poured out till nothing remains. It is an anthem which never can be rendered in all its melodiousness by the "hundred and forty and four thousand,"⁸ with their harps of gold, assisted by the choir of angels. It is a hive of honey higher than heaven, deeper than hell, "the

¹ Matt. i. 21.² Matt. i. 21.³ 1 Pet. i. 8.⁴ Ps. cxxxiii. 3.⁵ Hos. xiv. 7.⁶ Cant. vii. 9.⁷ Matt. xxvi. 7.⁸ Rev. vii. 4.

measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea,"¹ and its boundless stores of sweetnesses never can be exhausted. It is a world of goodness, a universe of grace, and a heaven of glory, and cannot be comprehended even by the circumference of eternity which was described before the beginning by the golden compasses of Jehovah.

"No tongue of mortal can express,
No letters write its blessedness :
Alone who hath thee in his heart
Knows, love of Jesus, what thou art."

Jesus was altogether lovely when his parents carried Him to Jerusalem, and publicly presented Him to the Lord as the law required. Taking "two young pigeons" as their offering, for they were poor, and their beautiful and beloved child, Joseph and Mary went up to the temple, and there they were met by those two distinguished saints, Simeon and Anna, who were waiting for "the consolation of Israel." Like all the covenant people, these devoted servants of the Most High were anxiously looking for their long-promised Messiah, but whilst their fellow-citizens were left in blindness of mind they were blest with such spiritual discernment that they recognized their own and the world's Redeemer in the Son of Mary. And, as Simeon took the tender babe in his trembling arms, he blessed God, and said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to

¹ Job xi. 9.

lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." ¹ And, while he was yet speaking, Anna, the aged and consecrated widow, came in, and "gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of Him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem." ²

Jesus was altogether lovely in His perfect childhood. He was never wayward like all other children, and often as His mother carried Him in her kind arms, and sung Him over on her gentle bosom, she noticed that He was never fretful. He was a pattern of filial affection, for He obeyed and honored and loved His parents. He was such a holy, harmless, and heavenly-minded child that His father and mother never entertained any fears that He would go astray. He was a "proper child" from His birth; and He became more beautiful and fascinating every day in His childish simplicity, and never manifested any of those evil propensities which belong to the children of men.

"When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things." ³ Such was Paul's experience, and our own also; and the Saviour's experience differs from it only in this, that before He became a man He put away childish things. At the early age of twelve years He walked five and sixty miles with His parents to keep the feast of Passover in Jerusalem. To an ordinary child "the city of the Great King" ⁴ would have presented many

¹ Luke ii. 29-32.

² Luke ii. 38.

³ 1 Cor. xiii. 11.

⁴ Ps. xlviii. 2.

attractions, but the "holy child Jesus" noticed none of them; for He was looking "not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen."¹ He was already living in another world, and had other things to do than what seemed suitable to His tender age. Without any introduction and unattended, He resorted to the Temple, where the wisest men of the commonwealth were assembled. He modestly took a seat among them. The old and gray-headed fathers of learning and religion scarcely saw the young child, who was "ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to."² But in a little while He entered into the debate with these masters in Israel. "And all that heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers."■ His parents were well on their way home before they missed Him; and after three days' diligent search they found Him there sitting among the doctors, and when they remonstrated with Him for causing them so much sorrow, He answered them in these words of surprising sublimity, "How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"⁴

Jesus was altogether lovely in His holy baptism. When the set time came for the Saviour to enter upon the official duties of His royal priesthood, He went down from Galilee to the River Jordan to be baptized by John. The strange request of Jesus was a great surprise to John, and he declined to admin-

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 18.

³ Luke ii. 47.

² 1 Sam. xvi. 12.

⁴ Luke ii. 49.

ister the ordinance to One so much better and greater than himself, and "the latchet of whose shoes"¹ he was not worthy to unloose. "John forbad Him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered Him. And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him: and lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."²

Jesus was altogether lovely when He was so sorely tempted of the devil. Taking advantage of the Saviour's bodily weakness, Satan fell upon Him with his wickedest wiles after He had been fasting forty days and forty nights. The complete exhaustion of "the Holy One" seemed a golden opportunity to the subtlety of the old serpent. A more noble adversary would have waited till his antagonist had broken his fast after abstaining from food for so long a time, but there is no magnanimity about Satan, and his only hope of success was in the Saviour's pining hunger. "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread."³ This first temptation was timely and terrible. Bread was just what Jesus wanted so much, and what harm could there be in making bread after this manner? The suggestion was plausible, and nothing could have been easier. "Speak the

¹ Mark i. 7.

² Matt. iii. 14-17.

³ Matt. iv. 3.

word only,"¹ and these stones shall be meat indeed. The fiery dart was fledged with the appearance of sympathy and the strongest craving of our nature, but it fell at the Saviour's feet, and was broken by this sword of the Spirit which was drawn by the most skilful hand. "It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God."²

Foiled in his first attempt, Satan immediately makes another. Having many devices, he changes his tactics. The wilderness was waste and howling, and the Son of man must not remain among "the wild beasts"³ any more, so the crafty tempter brings Him into the holy city and to a pinnacle of the temple, and says unto Him, "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence: for it is written, He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone."⁴ Some sign seemed necessary, and what harm could there be in making such a demonstration as would convince the gain-sayers? Besides, the place was the best that could be chosen and the time was propitious. "Cast thyself down," and let all the people see what thou art and whence thou camest. If the promises are good for food, they are good for wings as well. But the devil's quotation from Scripture did not help him very much. The Master saw through the thin disguise, and answered as before, "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."⁵

¹ Matt. viii. 8.

² Luke iv. 9-11.

³ Luke iv. 4.

⁴ Matt. iv. 7.

⁵ Mark i. 13.

Disappointed, but not discouraged, Satan makes yet another attempt to induce the Saviour to sin. It is hard to be poor, — to have no home, nor money to go to market, nor a place to lay the head. And riches are good, and crowns and thrones are greatly to be desired. And, thinking that one in such low estate would be glad to go up higher, Satan promises wealth and power and glory for a little worship. "Again, the devil taketh Him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto Him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth Him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto Him."¹

Jesus was altogether lovely in His public ministry. He was a man of mercies, and His words and works were like Himself. Such a wonderful person could not help speaking wonderful words and doing wonderful things. His divine messages and the miracles that He wrought were just as natural to Him as the falling of the rain and the rising of the sun. He never did any thing for the purpose of making a show, or to display His skill, or to gratify the love of the marvellous. A beautiful and blameless man, He went about beaming with beneficence. He cleared whole cities of their sick folk, and there was not one feeble person among the people. To relieve an embarrass-

¹ Matt. iv. 8.

ment at a wedding, He changed the water into wine. When He went unto His disciples in the storm, the boisterous waves of the sea kissed the soles of His feet, proud to bear up their princely Master; and at His bidding they fell asleep, "and there was a great calm." Wherever He went blessings abounded. His path was so bright He seemed to walk on sunbeams, "and the earth shined with His glory." ¹

Again and again the Scribes and Pharisees strove to entangle Him in His talk, but so wise and gentle was His management that they themselves were entangled, and went away silenced and ashamed. When they brought unto Him the woman taken in adultery, quoting the law of Moses, and hoping that His judgment would be contrary thereto, "Jesus stooped down, and with His finger wrote on the ground, as though He heard them not." ² But when they pressed the hard question, "He lifted up Himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last."

When they tempted Him with the insidious inquiry whether it was lawful for them to pay tribute to the Romans, knowing their hypocrisy and perceiving their craftiness, He confounded them with their own coin. Holding a penny in His hand, He said unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? And they said unto Him, Cæsar's. And Jesus, answering, said

¹ Ezek. xliii. 2.

² John viii. 6.

unto them, Render therefore unto Cæsar, the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God, the things that are God's. "And they could not take hold of His words before the people: and they marvelled at His answer, and held their peace."¹ After this manner Jesus answered all the hard questions of the masters in Israel, till they became so discouraged in their wicked designs "that they durst not ask Him any question at all."²

Jesus was altogether lovely in His ignominious death. From the moment that He was arrested in Gethsemane till He expired on Calvary, His conduct was more than human. No mere man was ever so magnanimous, and manifested so much sympathy for His friends and foes. Rudely taken into custody as a thief, and tried for blasphemy, and tried again for treason, and never tried at all, He endured the insulting mockery with omnipotent composure. Before Annas and Caiaphas, before Pilate and Herod, He behaved with equal serenity. "Behold the man!"³ He is treading the winepress alone. Neither Peter nor James nor John is there; not one to speak a word for Him. Neither Mary of Bethany, nor Mary Magdalene, nor Mary "the mother of my Lord,"⁴ is there; not one to shed a tear for Him. But He was more than equal to the great emergency, and when He was reviled He "reviled not again."⁵ He felt pity for those poor "potsherds of the earth"⁶ in their unequal strife with Himself, the heavenly Potter. Not

¹ Luke xx. 26.² Luke xx. 40.³ John xix. 5.⁴ Luke i. 43.⁵ 1 Pct. ii. 23.⁶ Isa. xlv. 9.

one unkind word escaped His lips, "when He suffered He threatened not."¹ For the most part "Jesus held His peace,"² and only broke the sublime silence when His royal claims were called in question. His last breath was praying breath, and His last petition but one was offered for those who put Him to death. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do:"³ and on the day of Pentecost some of them found forgiveness, and in the precious blood they shed they washed away the sin of shedding it.

There must have been something in the Saviour's appearance and manner which enlisted the sympathy of so many strangers and enemies. Pilate's wife was a heathen woman, but she sympathized with Jesus; and, when her husband was set down on the judgment-seat, she sent him this remarkable message: "Have thou nothing to do with that just man."⁴ And Pilate himself declared that he "found no fault in this man;" "no, nor yet Herod;"⁵ and after he had made many attempts to set Him at liberty and could prevail nothing, "he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person."⁶ And Judas "the son of perdition,"⁷ when he saw that the Saviour was condemned, went and threw the tormenting "thirty pieces of silver" down in the temple before the chief priests and elders, saying, "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood."⁸ To the sorrowful

¹ 1 Pet. ii. 23.

⁴ Matt. xxvii. 19.

⁷ John xvii. 12.

² Matt. xxvi. 63.

⁵ Luke xxiii. 15.

⁸ Matt. xxvii. 4.

³ Luke xxiii. 34.

⁶ Matt. xxvii. 24.

women who bewailed and lamented Him, Jesus said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children."¹ Even the dying thief rejoiced to rebuke his companion in crime in these wonderful words, "We receive the due reward of our deeds : but this man hath done nothing amiss."² And, overwhelmed with what he heard and saw, the Roman centurion exclaimed, "Truly this man was the Son of God."³ And the whole multitude who witnessed the crucifixion were touched with sympathy for the suffering Saviour. "All the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned."⁴

Jesus was altogether lovely in His burial. By a special interposition of providence, and according to an ancient prophecy, His broken, bleeding, and blessed body was saved from the sad fate of mingling promiscuously with the bones of slaves and thieves and murderers in Golgotha, that meaner place of burial than the potter's field. As soon as they were sure that He was dead, a man of great wealth and high standing in society came to the rescue of the remains of his Redeemer. "Joseph of Arimathæa, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus : and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus."⁵ And while he was engaged in his holy work he was joined by another "honorable counsellor" like himself, a brother Rabbi and "ruler

¹ Luke xxiii. 28.² Luke xxiii. 41.³ Mark xv. 39.⁴ Luke xxiii. 48.⁵ John xix. 38.

in Israel," and a secret disciple too, "Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night."¹ And so that Saviour, who was so poor that He had "not where to lay His head,"² whether living or dying, and who was so despised that He had just died "even the death of the cross," was embalmed and borne to His burial in the kind arms of two of the most distinguished men in the nation. "And He made His grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death."³

Jesus was altogether lovely in His resurrection. The tomb which was hewn out of a rock, the great stone rolled against its door and sealed, and the steel-clad soldiers, could not detain the Lord of Glory in the grave. He went down into the sepulchre to measure swords with the last enemy on his own chosen ground, and when He was dead He "abolished death;"⁴ and, when His body was lying lifeless in the sepulchre, He changed the dark and narrow house into the bright and spacious robing room for heaven, where this mortal shall put on the immortality. The grave is not what it once was, since Jesus hath lain there. The Pagans lightened its darkness with a burning lamp, but the lamp went out at last, and the thick darkness returned. But in the Saviour's tomb two angels were seen in shining garments. The angels of the sepulchre are still about their Master's business, sitting one at the head and another at the feet of every Christian in the cemetery. And as Jesus rose again from the dead, so shall all His saints.

¹ John xix. 39.

² Matt. viii. 20.

³ Isa. liii. 9.

⁴ 2 Tim. i. 10.

"Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth : my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell. Thou wilt show me the path of life : in thy presence is fulness of joy ; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." ¹

Jesus was altogether lovely during His short sojourn in the earth after His resurrection. He was not in haste to depart from this world, even after His work was done. By His death His disciples were sorely disappointed. The cross fell upon their hearts and crushed out their long-cherished expectations, and their brightest hopes were blasted and buried with Jesus, in the same grave. And to revive these withered hopes, and to assure His friends that He was alive again to die no more, and that the long-looked-for kingdom would surely come, He tarried here and appeared amongst His followers, and talked with them. Twice He came to the prayer-meeting, but not as before the resurrection. There was no sound of footsteps ascending the stairs to the upper room. The bolted doors were not opened ; but Jesus passed through them and stood in the midst of the faithful eleven, and convinced them of his personal identity, and comforted and cheered their hearts. He had no visible chariot, and was seldom seen walking with His friends ; and yet He often appeared among them, and disappeared as He pleased. For forty days He lingered and looked after His scattered sheep, and gathered them together and inspired them with the most glorious prospects of the spread of the

¹ Ps. xvi. 9, 10, 11.

gospel, as preached by them. "And these signs shall follow them that believe: In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover."¹

Jesus was altogether lovely in His ascension from the world. His work was done, and it was well done, and nothing was left undone. He could say to the Father as He did, "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."² He had destroyed death. He had emptied the grave. He had opened heaven. And now He is about to return to the glory which He had with the Father before the world began. The time of His departure is at hand. He has taken the last walk in this "valley of Baca" with His dear disciples, "as far as to Bethany."³ Behold His hands are lifted up over their heads and He is blessing them. As the benediction descends, He ascends, attended by angels. He rises higher. He is parted from us, and a cloud receives Him out of our sight, but not out of our hearing. "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory."⁴

¹ Mark xvi. 17.

³ Luke xxiv. 50.

² John xvii. 4.

⁴ Ps. xxiv. 7-10.

Jesus is altogether lovely now, enthroned at "the right hand of the Majesty on high."¹ He is the Prime Minister of the divine government, "and He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth."² The Father hath highly exalted His own son, "and hath put all things under His feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all."³ He is still about His Father's business, looking after His own chosen people, and making all things to work together for their good. Seated on the throne of grace, He is always accessible to His loved and loving friends. He hears all their petitions, redresses all their wrongs, supplies all their wants, and in all His intercourse with them He is mild and gentle and lovely beyond comparison. "A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench."⁴ And in the night of weeping He will not forget them, for "in the fourth watch," when no star of hope is shining in their heaven, He will come driving down the sky to their relief, and the light of His countenance, travelling faster than His chariot wheels, turns their rayless night to perfect day.

"In darkest shades, if He appear,
My dawning is begun;
He is my soul's bright morning star,
And He my rising sun."

Jesus will be altogether lovely when He shall re-

¹ Heb. i. 3.

² Dan. iv. 35.

³ Eph. i. 22, 23.

⁴ Isa. xlii. 3.

turn to the earth. "When the son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory."¹ "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God."² "Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of hosts shall reign in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before His ancients gloriously."³ "He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before Him ; and His enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents : the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before Him : all nations shall serve Him."⁴

"And the seventh angel sounded ; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ ; and He shall reign for ever and ever."⁵ "And I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away ; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God ; and the books were opened : and another book was opened, which is the book of life : and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works."⁶

¹ Matt. xxv. 31.

³ Isa. xxiv. 23.

⁵ Rev. xi. 15.

² 1 Thess. iv. 16.

⁴ Ps. lxxii. 8-11.

⁶ Rev. xx. 11, 12.

“Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ ;”¹ “therefore let us not sleep, as do others ; but let us watch and be sober.”² “Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless.”³

“Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them : but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh ; go ye out to meet Him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil ; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so ; lest there be not enough for us and you : but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came ; and they that were ready went in with Him to the marriage : and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord,

¹ Tit. ii. 13.² 1 Thess. v. 6.³ 2 Pet. iii. 12-14.

Lord, open to us. But He answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh."¹

Jesus only is altogether lovely. There have been many lovely persons in the world. They were so lovely that the world was not worthy of them; and having kept the faith so well and turned so many to righteousness they went away to the better country where they are shining "as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever."² And there are men and women in the world now so amiable and angel-like that it is a joy to know them, and it is a good sermon just to look at them. By their many excellent qualities they command our admiration, and they live only to adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour. Yes, they are lovely, but they are not altogether lovely, and the holiest saints out of heaven are not all holy. In the spiritual garden of our Lord's own "elect Lady," there were left a number of foxes, "the little foxes, that spoil the vines."³ And the good name of the best Christian in the visible church is ever and again proclaiming its imperfections like the apothecary's ointment in which the "dead flies"⁴ are found.

Abraham was a good man, and a man greatly beloved. He seems to have been a special favorite of Heaven, and was chosen from among the heathen to be the father of God's own people. Of all the human

¹ Matt. xxv. 1-13.

³ Cant. ii. 15.

² Dan. xii. 3.

⁴ Eccl. x. i.

race he is the only one who has been counted worthy to be called "the friend of God."¹ And he was so called by God Himself, "Abraham my friend."² The friend of God was highly honored, for he often entertained angels in his tent and the Lord of angels. The everlasting Father sometimes came down from heaven and communed with Abraham, and talked with him as we talk with one another. But when weighed in the balance of absolute perfection the father of the faithful is found wanting. Strange to say, his faith failed on one occasion, and through fear of man he denied his wife and said, "She is my sister;"³ for which he was rebuked by a pagan monarch.

And Job the most patient of all men, — the upright man who held fast his integrity in all storms, — the perfect man, as he is expressly called in his own inspired book and by the Lord Himself, was not perfect in the sense of sinlessness. His own self is the best authority for this statement. "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse."⁴ In his manifold misfortunes he manifested the passive virtues more than any other person. And the sweetest expressions of resignation and submission to the divine will that can be found in human language are those that fell from his lips. "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."⁵ "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."⁶ But the same fountain sent forth the bitter

¹ James ii. 23.² Isa. xli. 8.³ Gen. xii. 19.⁴ Job ix. 20.⁵ Job i. 21.⁶ Job xiii. 15.

waters beginning with these words, "Let the day perish wherein I was born."¹

And King David who was gently lifted from the lowest to the highest earthly estate, — David the most devout of men, the man after God's own heart and who had the deepest experience of divine things; "the sweet psalmist of Israel,"² whose harp was better than his crown, and whose adoring heart composed those spiritual songs which have been sung in Zion ever since, and some of which will be sung in heaven; that holy man of old who loved the ark of God so much, and envied those blessed birds the sparrow and the swallow, because their nests were so near the altar, and who uttered this devout behest, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple,"³ — this saintliest of the sons of men broke two of the ten commandments, and more than two.

And Solomon his son and successor, — the wisest of all men, whose renown spread abroad throughout all the earth, and whose glory the Queen of Sheba went to see; the royal poet, whose songs were "a thousand and five;" the royal moralist, "who spake three thousand proverbs;"⁴ the royal judge, who was famous for the honesty and the equity of his decisions, — this man who was inspired to write three of the best books in the Bible, and who has given to us the most charm-

¹ Job iii. 2.

² 2 Sam. xxiii. 1.

³ Ps. xxvii. 4.

⁴ 1 Kings iv. 32.

ing description of the Saviour, was a greater sinner than his father David. He was good and bad by turns, but the bad preponderated ; and though, as we believe, he repented of his great transgressions, and was "a brand plucked out of the fire,"¹ yet he died under such a dark cloud that the question whether he was saved or lost has been debated ever since. And in a celebrated picture of the day of judgment, in a European church, he is represented as coming up between the righteous and the wicked, and looking ambiguously both ways, as if he himself was uncertain whether he was going to heaven or hell.

And John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, and who leaned on Jesus' breast at supper, — the lamb-like and lovely John, to whose tender care the Saviour commended His mother when the sword was piercing through her own soul also ; John the divine, who wrote the best Gospel and the best Epistles in the New Testament, — John was not just like Jesus. Oh, no ! He was one of "the sons of thunder ;"² and at one time he manifested such a vindictive spirit that he wanted to call down fire from heaven to consume certain Samaritans, because they refused to receive the Master and His friends into their houses. "When His disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did ?"³ At another time he manifested such a sectarian spirit that he would rather men should go possessed with devils all their days than that they should be healed

¹ Zech. iii. 2.

² Mark iii. 17.

³ Luke ix. 54.

and made happy by those who did not belong to the Saviour's company: "John answered Him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbad him, because he followeth not us."¹

But Jesus was altogether lovely, and Jesus only. None of His disciples were just like Him; no, not one. Some of them were guilty of the greatest sins, as we have seen, while faults and flaws of imperfection appeared in the character of each, and there were also many other infirmities which could not be seen except by the omniscient eye. Every rose has a thorn except "the Rose of Sharon." Every sun has spots except "the Sun of Righteousness." And the "angel standing in the sun"² can cast no shadow.

But Jesus was angry, He denounced the Pharisees, He destroyed the Gadarene swine, He cursed a fig-tree, and He preached the doctrine of everlasting punishment. These mites, these moles, these minute microscopic mistakes, falsely so called, have been discovered in the character of Jesus, and denounced and delighted in by the moles and bats and owls of darkness, and are often spoken of as bringing down the Saviour from the pinnacle of perfection, and making Him altogether like one of ourselves. But in our opinion these exceptions to our Saviour's perfectly finished and divinely beautiful character are so many excellencies, and rather serve to brighten the lustre of His loveliness.

He was angry. And why not? how could He help

¹ Mark ix. 38.

² Rev. xix. 17.

it? and what harm was there in being so? And did not Jesus do well to be angry? Have you not read, have you not heard that there is a divine anger? And do you not know that it is written in the Old Testament that "God is angry with the wicked every day"?¹ There is also a human anger, a proper holy indignation which may be exercised by us without leaving the smallest stain upon our reputation. "Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath."² And if God is angry with the wicked every day, and if we may be angry and innocent, it should not be considered a surprising thing if the Saviour's holy soul was sometimes so stirred within Him that it could not help overflowing in the bitterest and most burning words that were ever uttered. But in every such case what Jesus said was the natural and necessary outburst of a bleeding heart that was yearning most tenderly, like Joseph's, over those to whom He was speaking so roughly. His anger was all gentleness, His severity was the sweetness of His love, and His wrath was "the wrath of the Lamb."

And He denounced the Pharisees. Yes, He did. And, though these denunciations were deserved, they are often spoken of as inconsistent with that charity that "suffereth long, and is kind."³ But let us see. These Pharisees were the blind guides of the blind; and they knew it, and Jesus knew it. In their black hearts there was nothing hid from Him. He saw their base hypocrisy, and hated it with perfect hatred. Sitting "in Moses' seat,"⁴ they were luring poor

¹ Ps. vii. 11.² Eph. iv. 26.³ 1 Cor. xiii. 4.⁴ Matt. xxiii. 2.

souls down to destruction. And as they were in danger of eternal damnation the Saviour could not be silent ; kindness to them would not permit Him to be silent. Nor could He have left unspoken a single word of His dreadful address, nor soften down one tittle of its terrible severity, lest His garments undefiled should be spattered with the blood of their souls in that day when "the great winepress of the wrath of God"¹ shall be trodden without the gates of the city. He who was Himself "the truth" must needs speak the truth, and "faithful are the wounds of a friend."²

Besides, it should not be forgotten that every word that Jesus uttered came up from the bottom of His heart, and must have been spoken with such mildness and melting pathos as only the heart can speak, as only the Saviour's heart could speak, "speaking the truth in love."³ A blatant unbeliever was once railing out, with unmeasured terms of condemnation, against these hard and harsh sayings of the Saviour, and declared they were more than enough to eclipse the lustre of His lovely life. A minister chanced to be present in the company, and without answering a word he opened the New Testament ; and in a soft, sweet, subdued, and solemn tone of voice, for which he was renowned, he began to read, "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!"⁴ But before he had time to finish the paragraph the astonished infidel interrupted him, saying, "Ah, was that the tone?

¹ Rev. xiv. 19.

² Prov. xxvii. 6.

³ Eph. iv. 15.

⁴ Matt. xxiii. 14.

was that the tone?" "No," was the quick reply, "that was not the tone: the Master's was a tenderer tone than mine, never man spake like this man."

Moreover, these sayings should be considered in their connection. You could not give a good opinion of a portrait by looking only at one feature, or at the background on which it is painted. You could not describe the rainbow by glancing only at two or three of the colors: you must look at all the seven, and when doing so you scarcely notice the black cloud which turns to brightness in the bow. Nor is it ever proper to judge of a sermon or its author by the first few sentences, or by selecting a short paragraph here and there, and criticising it apart from all the rest. In every well-constructed discourse there is a beginning, a middle, and an end; and these ought never to be put asunder, because they explain and illustrate one another. And having glanced at the beginning of the Saviour's sermon to the Scribes and Pharisees, which opens with such seeming severity, let us look now at the end. And what is the conclusion of the whole matter? The damnation of hell? No. The everlasting punishment? No. The wrath to come? No. But rather this softest, sweetest, tenderest, and most touching appeal that Jesus ever made, every letter of which seems a tear which only His own sorrowful soul could shed: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"¹ De-

¹ Matt. xxiii. 37.

hold, therefore, the goodness and severity of Jesus! The severity, how short it is! How like a flash of lightning it comes and goes in the twinkling of an eye! The goodness, how long it is! How long-suffering, how loving! And withal how mother-like it is in its tender carefulness, "How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not." In this "would not" the "woe" disappears entirely, and the "gentleness of Christ"¹ shines out in bold and most beautiful relief, like the "bow in the cloud."²

And Jesus destroyed the Gadarene swine. We deny the imputation: He did no such thing. He never destroyed a particle of personal property, and this calamity cannot be laid to His charge. The swine destroyed themselves. "The herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked."³ It is true the Saviour permitted the devils to enter into the unclean animals, and immediately they became so wild that they rushed blindly and against their will to their own destruction. And, if granting the request of the evil spirits helped in any way to restore the tormented maniacs to their right mind, it is a complete justification of the Master's conduct, because two men are of more value than two thousand swine.

Besides, it is probable that the herd belonged to Jews, who must have known that such property was proscribed by the law of Moses. But, residing among the Greeks and Romans in Gadara, these renegade

¹ 2 Cor. x. 1.² Gen. ix. 16.³ Luke viii. 33.

children of Abraham soon learned to live like their heathen neighbors ; and, mainly for the sake of making money, they engaged in the unlawful business of feeding swine for the Gentile market. It made no matter to them if it was the meanest business in the world, and so positively forbidden by the divine law, money was the chief end of these men, and though their lucre was filthy enough, it was lucre and they liked it ; and the destruction of their property was a just and righteous judgment.

It was then as now, and now as then ; the curse of heaven — big, broad, and black as hell — is stamped on every dollar of dishonesty, and the “treasures of wickedness profit nothing.”¹ By embarking in illicit traffic, prosperity may follow ; but it is that kind of prosperity that is the mother of adversity. All riches are “uncertain riches ;” the honest earnings of industry and economy often make themselves wings : but the wages of sin never fail to fly away. Nor is it strange that it should be so, because ill-gotten gains, by whomsoever held, are the damned possessions of the devil, and soon or late that which is borrowed from below is sure to go back to its own place, and Satan never takes his own without usury.

But Jesus cursed a fig-tree when it had no fruit, and when He must have known that it had no fruit, and when it could have no fruit, “for the time of figs was not yet.”² And for more than eighteen hundred years, the enemies of Christianity have fastened upon this fact as going far to show that the man Christ

¹ Prov. x. 2.

² Mark xi. 13.

Jesus was not the perfect character that He is often represented to be. It is held as unbecoming for any person to curse any thing, and most of all to curse a tree, that could have no moral character. But a tree is often taken as the emblem of a person, and we often clothe it with the garments of humanity and morality, both when we speak of it as "a good tree" or "a bad tree," or a tree that bringeth forth good fruit or bad fruit. And this is all the Saviour did. He saw by the wayside a tree having a profusion of leaves, which is a profession of fruit, as the fruit on the fig-tree appears always before the leaves; and when He found that it had no fruit thereon, He cursed it, not because it was barren, but because it was bad. Professing to have fruit when it had none, it was as false as it was fair. Its abundant foliage seemed like the broad phylacteries of the Pharisees, like the lofty pretensions of the peculiar people; and Jesus cursed it for their sakes, and as a warning to them, and to all those also of every age upon whom, at last, there shall be "found nothing but leaves."¹

Every other miracle was a work of mercy, bringing help and healing to those who were in distress; and this is the only work of judgment, if indeed it be a work of judgment, because when rightly understood, as a warning to the wicked, it seems to us the greatest work of mercy that the Saviour ever wrought. The nation was nigh unto cursing because of their hypocrisy. For many years they had been treasuring up "wrath against the day of wrath."² But Jesus

¹ Mark xi. 13.

² Rom. ii. 5.

would not curse them. His loving heart would not let Him curse them. But He cursed a tree,—a tree only, a “tree in the way,”¹ that they might see in its withered leaves and roots the last end of their present selves, if they persisted in living in a vain show, and dying with a lie in their right hand. “Can the rush grow up without mire? can the flag grow without water? Whilst it is yet in his greenness, and not cut down, it withereth before any other herb. So are the paths of all that forget God; and the hypocrite’s hope shall perish: whose hope shall be cut off, and whose trust shall be a spider’s web.”²

And last of all Jesus preached the doctrine of future punishment. Yes, He did. We have no desire to demur to this indictment. We accept the imputation. We go further, and confess that Christ proclaimed this doctrine plainer and oftener than any of the prophets. He proclaimed it plainer and oftener than any of the apostles. The doctrine of a future state was but dimly revealed till Jesus came, bringing “life and immortality to light through the gospel.”³ And the doctrine of future rewards and punishments was still more dimly revealed. Here and there in the Old Testament there is a faint adumbration of it, or something that looks like its shadow; but it was left for the Saviour to reveal it in all the fulness of its meaning. In His teachings hell rests precisely on the same foundation as heaven; and exactly the same

¹ Matt. xxi. 19.

² Job viii. 11-14.

³ 2 Tim. i. 10.

word¹ is used to express the duration of each. And, if there be a limit to the sufferings of the lost, there may be a limit to the rejoicings of the saved ; and, if there be no end to heaven, there will be no end to hell.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus was spoken not by a prophet, nor by an apostle, but by Jesus. It is true it is only a picture of the future state of the righteous and the wicked ; but, if this be only a representation, what must be the reality ? If this be but the shadow, what must be the substance ? And, instead of blaming the blameless Saviour for preaching this salutary doctrine, we ought rather to bless His holy name. If there be such a place as hell, is it not better that we should know it ? Is it not better that we should be reminded of it, lest we should walk ignorantly and unawares into that place of torment "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" ?² Shall the pit be covered like "the snare of the fowler" ? God forbid. "For Tophet is ordained of old ; yea, for the king it is prepared ; he hath made it deep and large : the pile thereof is fire and much wood ; the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it."³

And next to Jesus Himself and that heaven which He has gone to prepare for us, there is nothing for which we should be so thankful as for His revelation of hell ; for, were it not for the fear of its eternal punishment, thousands more would have travelled thither.

¹ *Αἰώνιον*, Matt. xxv. 46.

² Mark ix. 44.

³ Isa. xxx. 33.

And even now with all our light and knowledge, if the belief of this doctrine could be blotted out of men's minds everywhere, there would be no need of future punishment or a place of future punishment, because the world itself would be a perfect hell in two or three generations, and they that dwell therein would become the angels of the devil. "The wrath of the Lamb" is therefore the next best thing to "the blood of the Lamb;" and the one is just as much an emblem of the Saviour's loveliness as the other. Bless the Lord, O my soul for heaven and for hell. "And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever."¹

One end of the magnet draws ; the other end repels : but it is the same mysterious power that acts so differently at the extremities of the loadstone. And these two truths of the Divine word are one and the same truth. They are the negative and positive sides of the Saviour's sacred heart, the north and south poles of His everlasting love. And, though to all seeming they act so contrary to one another, they are really working together all the while for our good. To warn men is only another way to win them, and driving them away from hell is only another name for drawing them to heaven. "Of some have compassion, making a difference ; and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire."²

In making an end to this long chapter, these words of Scripture come to us with more than their usual force: "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ."³ "Let

¹ Rev. xix. 3.² Jude 22.³ Rom. xiii. 14.

this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”¹ “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him.”² The altogether lovely Saviour is more than our only Mediator: He is also our only model. He is both the propitiation for our sins and the pattern for our lives. He lived the life of holiness that we might learn how to live; and then He died to save us from our sins, “Leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps,”³ and man’s chief end is to be like Jesus. In all our conduct and conversation there should be the closest imitation of the pure and spotless Son of Mary; and, as far as it is possible, we should repeat His splendid career of well doing.

➤ We are not so good nor so useful as we might be, because we do not set the Lord always before us. We are lean and ill-favored, and our work lingers, because men become our models. We are content if we may be as heavenly-minded as some of those ancient worthies “who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”⁴ But the best of men are not good enough to set us an example; and we have a higher calling than to be like Job or Jeremiah or James or John: we are called to be like Jesus. Even Paul, with all his attainments in holiness, would not have us follow him except so far as he followed the perfect, peerless pattern, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.”⁵

¹ Phil. ii. 5.

■ Col. ii. 6.

³ 1 Pet. ii. 21.

⁴ Heb. vi. 12.

⁵ 1 Cor. xi. 1.

When one of our most successful missionaries was sorely depressed at the slow progress of the gospel among the heathen, his wife, thinking to entertain him, read aloud several newspaper notices in which her distinguished husband was likened to one or other of the apostles. But instead of being entertained the good man was more depressed than ever; and, after a solemn pause, he said, "Nor do I want to be like them. I do not want to be like Paul, nor Apollos, nor Cephas, nor any mere man. I want to be like Christ. We have only one perfectly safe exemplar; only One who, tempted like as we are in every point, is still without sin. I want to follow Him only,—copy His teachings, drink in His spirit, place my feet in His footsteps, and measure their short-comings by these and these alone. Oh, to be more like Christ!" And this should be our aim, and more than this. Not only to be more like Christ, but to be altogether like Christ. There is no telling how perfectly we may copy "the image of the heavenly"¹ even in this life, and as there is no limit to the loveliness of Christ, there is none to the degree of excellence that we may attain unto: "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body."² Jesus came from heaven to bring God down to us, and He went back to heaven to bring us up to God, and who can tell how much less than divine it is to be made "partakers of the divine nature"?³

We may not be able to give much to advance the

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 49.

² 2 Cor. iv. 10.

³ 2 Pet. i. 4.

Redeemer's kingdom in the earth, nor to speak eloquently in the name of Jesus; but we can do that which is better than either or both: we can put on Christ; we can live Christ. "For me to live is Christ."¹ And to live Christ is better than abounding in the grace of giving; to live Christ is better than preaching Christ, because it is preaching Christ by example, and with "the power of an endless life."² The Christ-like Christian is a charity sermon, a charity sermon that never ceases. By a simple act of worship, righteous Abel preached a sermon six thousand years ago, "and by it he being dead yet speaketh."³ Like the smallest planet nearest the sun, the poorest and humblest believer may be and should be a very Mercury, with divine eloquence silently to speak, by reflecting the warmest and brightest rays of the Sun of Righteousness to those who are sitting in the region and shadow of death.

Moreover, that man who is "manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ"⁴ is a stronger argument for the truth of our religion than the Epistle to the Romans. Paul never wrote any thing so convincing as his own unwritten life. His example is better than all his letters. And now, as then, the living epistle is the best logic. Long ago the written word of God was finished, and nothing can be added thereunto; but the living word of God is growing larger all the time. Every new convert is another "revelation of Jesus Christ," inspired "to testify the gospel of the

¹ Phil. i. 21.

■ Heb. xi. 4.

² Heb. vii. 16.

⁴ 2 Cor. iii. 3.

grace of God ;”¹ and as he is the only holy Bible that some people ever read, he may be the means of doing as much good as if he were the only “revelation of Jesus Christ.” And, when he is gone to the grave, there shall be sermons from his sepulchre till his dead dust shall live again. “I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth : Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors ; and their works do follow them.”²

As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so our souls are panting after perfection. We are hungering and thirsting after Jesus Himself, and Jesus only, and Jesus always, who is all our salvation and all our desire. We love to think about His attributes and perfections, but we love to think about Himself much more. “My meditation of Him shall be sweet.”³ His holy word is good for food. His holy supper is better than His holy word, but Himself is best of all, because He only is the “bread of life” and the “water of life,” which if we eat thereof and drink thereof we shall “hunger no more, neither thirst any more.”

The means of grace are nothing without Jesus, whose real presence in them gives them all their preciousness. We could not do without them now, because they bring our Beloved so near, and render Him so dear to us that He is “the chiefest among ten thousand ;” but if only we had more of “His own self,”⁴ we would not be so dependent upon these helps

¹ Acts xx. 24.

³ Ps. civ. 34.

² Rev. xiv. 13.

⁴ 1 Pet. ii. 24.

in the way of holiness, and He would be to us the chiefest among "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands."¹

Blessed Jesus, lift us higher, and make us more and more like thyself. Teach us to walk without crutches, to run without feet, and to fly without wings. In thy "two distinct natures and one person for ever," be thou our Old and New Testaments, and incline our hearts to study thee more and more. Be thou our baptism, and grant us that special blessing which this sign signifies and seals, and let a double portion of thy Holy Spirit abide with us continually. And be thou our great supper. Day by day may we feed and feast on thee thyself, eating thy flesh and drinking thy blood; for thy flesh is meat indeed, and thy blood is drink indeed. "Oh, let not the Lord be angry,"² and we will speak yet but this once. Lift us higher still into thine own perfect likeness of perfect love, and into thine own present heaven of perfect rest and perfect peace, and make us altogether lovely as thou art. "And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it."³

The "Transfiguration," by Raphael, is beyond question the most wonderful work of art in all the world. It is often reproduced after this manner. The modern artist goes to the room in the Vatican where it hangs on the wall, and sits down under it. He looks at it. He changes his position and looks at it again.

¹ Rev. v. 11.

² Gen. xviii. 30.

³ Ps. xc. 17.

He looks at it from every point of observation and in every possible light. With enthusiastic admiration he gazes at the "appearance of the likeness" of the Saviour's glorified form and features. The face and hands and feet and shining garments are all examined with the most minute carefulness. And when at last he is inspired with the spirit of the great original, when his heart and soul and mind are all ablaze with the beauty and the glory of "the heavenly vision," taking his brush, and trembling at the task, he mixes his colors, and, looking at the picture, he begins to paint. A long and earnest look, and then a little stroke; another long and earnest look, and then another little stroke. Thus the days of the years pass away almost without observation. And thus the features are all fashioned well; the very expression reappears; and in due time, at the magic touch of toiling, self-sacrificing, and consecrated genius, the glowing canvas breathes again.

So, "in the volume of the book,"¹ there is a better likeness of our Lord for us to copy on the fleshly canvas of the heart. It is not an ideal but a real representation of the divine Son of Man. It is the inspired, life-like likeness of Him who is altogether lovely. And though the task that is set before us be the most difficult that was ever attempted, and though we be altogether unpractised with the pencil, we must not be discouraged, but have patience and persevere. Looking unto Jesus, and "line upon line;" looking unto Jesus, and "little by little," — will make a copy so

¹ Heb. x. 7.

complete at last that we shall be just like Jesus. And if we are ever chided for the years we spend sitting thus at the Saviour's feet, and for our over-niceness in this our life-work, then, with the patient, pains-taking, and persevering artist of the former time, we can truly say, and with a much better meaning, "I paint for eternity."

"Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen." ¹

Holy Ghost, with light and love divine, come and abide with us, and teach us all about Jesus. Incline our hearts to bring to thee all that we are and all that we have, our whole spirit and soul and body and substance; that they may be sanctified by thee and consecrated all for Jesus. And always, whether living or dying, may we be found all in Jesus. By thy constant indwelling may we be transformed by the renewing of our minds and purified and made perfect, till we shall be all like Jesus. And at last, when we have been transfigured, may we be translated to be all with Jesus.

"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." ¹

¹ Heb. xiii. 20, 21.

HIS FRIENDSHIP.

CHAPTER XV.

"This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend, O daughters of Jerusalem."

THE Bible begins with Jesus, and ends with Jesus; and from the beginning to the end it is all about Jesus. "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."¹ "The Tree of Life"² appears as the most prominent thing in the midst of the first paradise; and it reappears as the most prominent thing in the midst of the second paradise. "On either side of the river, was there the Tree of Life."³ Sitting down under the "shadow of good things to come,"⁴ Moses commenced to write "the revelation of Jesus Christ;" and, sitting down under the "very image of the things,"⁵ John has completed "the revelation of Jesus Christ."⁶

So the conclusion of our splendid soul-filling and sublime theme is very like the commencement. It has been our unspeakable pleasure to point out, as best we could, the excellent and engaging features of our dear Lord Jesus, who is the "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending."⁷ And as these feat-

¹ John v. 39.

² Gen. ii. 9.

³ Rev. xxii. 2.

⁴ Heb. x. 1.

⁵ Heb. x. 1.

⁶ Rev. i. 1.

⁷ Rev. i. 8.

ures passed under our review, we dwelt upon each one in particular. We also glanced at them altogether, the "many members in one body,"¹ striving, all the while, to express as much of their loveliness as the poverty of our language will permit. And now, to crown the whole and close our sweet meditation of "Him whom my soul loveth,"² we rejoice to say, "This is my Beloved and this is my Friend."³

Two precious thoughts are here suggested, — Jesus our Beloved, and Jesus our Friend. Both these thoughts are better than good, but as we have broken the "alabaster box"⁴ of the first, in the beginning of our book, we will confine ourselves to the second in this last chapter. And, as we unbind its bundle of myrrh, we trust the Holy Spirit will open the eyes of our understanding, and enlighten our minds, that we may see what a friend we have in Jesus. And, should we chance to say any thing over again that we have already said, we are sure that we shall repeat nothing that any Christian will ever tire of hearing.

Jesus is a personal friend. "This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend." I like this personal religion, "this pronoun religion," as it has been called. It is so pleasant and so precious to my soul. "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower."⁵

Besides, this personal religion is the only true religion. When Jesus was made a propitiation for the

¹ Rom. xii. 4.

² Cant. iii. 3.

■ Cant. v. 16.

■ Matt. xxvi. 7.

⁵ Ps. xviii. 2.

sins of the whole world, and died for all, He tasted death "for every man."¹ He "loved the church and gave Himself for it;"² but His love for the church was only His love for every one of His believing and blood-bought people: "who loved me and gave Himself for me."³ And His love for the family is nothing else than His love for each member in particular: "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus."⁴

The Good Shepherd knows not only how many sheep He has in His pasture, but He knows the name of every one of them: "He calleth His own sheep by name."⁵ He called one of them by name two hundred years before he was born, and made "Cyrus"⁶ His shepherd, to gather together His lost sheep in Babylon and bring them back to Jerusalem. He said to Moses, "I know thee by name."⁷ And to every one of His flock He says: "I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine."⁸ To the chief of the publicans who climbed the sycamore-tree to see Him, Jesus said: "Zacchæus, make haste, and come down; for to-day I must abide at thy house."⁹ To the red-handed Pharisee, on the road to Damascus, He said: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?"¹⁰

And in the same personal way He loves and looks after us all the time. To one of the twelve who was in great jeopardy He said, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you

¹ Heb. ii. 9.² Eph. v. 25.³ Gal. ii. 20⁴ John xi. 5.⁵ John x. 3.⁶ Isa. xlv. 28.⁷ Ex. xxxiii. 17.⁸ Isa. xliii. 1.⁹ Luke xix. 5.¹⁰ Acts ix. 4.

as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.”¹ And to the sorrowful woman at the sepulchre, He said, “Why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing Him to be the gardener, saith unto Him, Sir, if thou have borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary.”²

And even when we are going astray, like a lost sheep, the Chief Shepherd doth not forget us. “He restoreth my soul.”³ Leaving “the ninety and nine,”⁴ He looks after the wandering one; and, when He hath found it, He lifts it to His shoulder, rejoicing; or, if it be a lamb, He carries it in His bosom back to the fold, not as a member of the general flock, but as His own dear Mary or Martha or James or John, whose Christian name was so recorded in the book of life before the world began.

And lest those who are “less than the least of all saints”⁵ should ever entertain the tormenting thought that, among so many, they may be overlooked and neglected, we would remind them that they are, each and every one, as dear to Jesus as “the apple of His eye,”⁶ and He looks after them in the most personal, pains-taking, and particular manner. There is a special guiding of every pilgrim,—as special as if he were the only one the Saviour had to lead,—and there is just as special a sympathy for his every sorrow. You cannot heave the sigh in secret that is not heard in heaven. You cannot weep the tear in secret that

¹ Luke xxii. 31, 32.

² Luke xv. 4.

³ John xx. 15, 16.

⁴ Eph. iii. 8.

⁵ Ps. xxiii. 3.

⁶ Zech. ii. 8.

is not treasured up in heaven. "Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered."¹

To many, it does not seem a strange thing that the rulers of the earth should be under the care of Him by whom "kings reign, and princes decree justice;"² because these great people possess so much influence that they often change the current of events throughout the whole world. But the blessed truth is that the lowly are looked after just as much as the lofty. David among his father's "few sheep in the wilderness,"³ Elisha following the plough, and Paul learning the trade of tent-making, were just as much under the personal care of the Great Shepherd, as when the first became a king, and the second a prophet, and the third the chiefest of the apostles. And now, as formerly, and for ever, the saint supported by charity can say, "I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me."⁴ Sitting down to his scanty meal, he can repeat these wonderful words in asking the blessing: "Thou preparest a table before me."⁵ And those who have no table to sit down at, the poor way-faring man, can say: "Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways."⁶

And, if Jesus is such a personal friend to me, He will be just such a friend to mine. The covenant is not to me only, but to those who are to come after me. "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for

¹ Luke xii. 7.

² Prov. viii. 15.

³ 1 Sam. xvii. 28.

⁴ Ps. xl. 17.

⁵ Ps. xxiii. 5.

⁶ Ps. cxxxix. 3.

an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." ¹ "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." ²

When King David was firmly established on his throne, he remembered Jonathan, his dearest earthly friend, who had been dead for many years: and, as he thought how pleasant and wise and loving he was in his living day, the king's heart went out after the family of his departed friend; and he diligently inquired for those who might still survive, saying: "Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" ³ And they told him about Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son, who was lame in both his feet. And the king sent for him, and brought him to his own palace in Jerusalem, and adopted him as a member of his royal family, and said unto him, "I will surely show thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually." ⁴

So, for the sake of His friends, Christ will show kindness to their children, and to their children's children. "As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever." ⁵

¹ Gen. xvii. 7.

² Acts ii. 39.

³ 2 Sam. ix. 1.

⁴ 2 Sam. ix. 7.

⁵ Isa. lix. 21.

And if through their own fault, or some other cause, any of these children of the covenant should go astray, like the prodigal son ; if there should be a mocking Ishmael among them, or a profane Esau, or a rebellious Absalom, nay, if there should be more than one, if two of them should become wicked exceedingly, if there should be a Nadab and Abihu among them, or a Hophni and Phinehas ; nay, more, if all of them should offer strange fire on the altar, and make themselves vile, their broken-hearted father and mother can turn and stay themselves upon the personal loving-kindness of their Lord, saying, with one of old time whose children were not what they should have been : “ Although my house be not so with God ; yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure : for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although He make it not to grow.”¹

Jesus is an almighty friend. In the Highlands of Scotland a regiment of soldiers lost their way ; they were overtaken by a terrible snow-storm which came upon them unawares, and buried all the roads and hedges, and blotted out all the landmarks. There was no such thing as marching, for the men were so blinded and bewildered that they did not know which way to take ; and yet, to keep from freezing, they kept moving about as best they could ; but, in spite of their best efforts to save themselves alive, one man after another dropped into the drifting snow and disappeared.

¹ 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

There were two brothers belonging to this regiment, one of whom fell down through fatigue, and his strength was so far gone that he was unable to rise up, and there he must have expired soon; but his brother saw him and felt sorry for him, and, though he himself was hardly able to drag his weary feet along through the deepening drifts, he put both his arms around his beloved brother, and lifted him on his back and carried him along, until his "strong men" bowed themselves, and he staggered, and fell down, and died.

This brave and noble brother was not strong enough to save himself, and the loved one whom he carried; and, after struggling as long as he could, under the burden of his own brother, he fell at last, and perished in the storm. But Jesus, the brother "born for adversity,"¹ is almighty to deliver. "Travelling in the greatness of His strength,"² He shall carry us through all storms; for His legs are like pillars of marble, and stronger than pillars of marble. "The earth and all the inhabitants thereof are dissolved: I bear up the pillars of it."³ "Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?"⁴

For more than a month the champion of the Philistines had defied the armies of Israel; and Saul was doubtless glad enough when he heard that there was found a man, at last, who was willing to

¹ Prov. xvii. 17.

² Isa. lxiii. 1.

³ Ps. lxxv. 3.

⁴ Isa. xl. 28.

enter the arena against Goliath, but when he saw the stripling he was amazed. No: he will not hazard his crown and kingdom in such feeble hands, and so he remonstrated with the beardless boy, telling him plainly that he was not able to fight with the giant, because he was but a youth, and the man of Gath a soldier of great stature. But the young man reasoned with the king. He told him about the two wild beasts that he had slain. "David said moreover, The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine."¹ Pleased with such faith and hope, Saul consented to his taking the field, and clothed him with his own armor; but David declined to wear the cumbersome things, because he had not proved them. Besides, belonging to the tallest man in the realm, they were too large for him, and though they had been made to fit him he did not need them, for he had on "the whole armor of God."² He had proved that panoply, and knew by experience that there was more protection in it than in the best battle mail. Goliath was a giant, but he was not God; he was mighty, but he was not almighty; and, when he disdained his youthful antagonist, in these words David declared the secret of his strength: "Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied."³ In that name there was meaning. In that name there was might. It made a mere stripling more than a match for his giant adversary.

¹ 1 Sam. xvii. 37.² Eph. vi. 11.³ 1 Sam. xvii. 45.

And in all our conflicts with the world, the flesh, and the devil, that same name shall defend us. "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God."¹ Jesus is the Lord our God. He is God over all. And "if God be for us, who can be against us?"² Can the world? Jesus says, "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."³ Can the flesh? "Our old man is crucified with Him."⁴ Can the devil? Jesus is stronger than the "strong man armed,"⁵ and "the dragon, that old serpent,"⁶ is His chained captive. It is true, as Peter tells us, that our "adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."⁷ But see, there is a great chain round one of his feet, and the other end of it is held in the Saviour's almighty hand; so that Satan can only go where he is permitted to go, and not one foot further than the length of his chain.

He could not touch Job, either in person or property, till he received a license in heaven; nor could he enter into the herd of swine even, till Jesus gave him leave. And when he gets permission from his Master to come and confront us face to face, we should not fear for the result; because, in the might of our Omnipotent Friend, we shall be more than a match for "the prince of the power of the air,"⁸ and all his angels. "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my

¹ Ps. xx. 7.² Rom. viii. 31.³ John xvi. 33.⁴ Rom. vi. 6.⁵ Luke xi. 21.⁶ Rev. xx. 2.⁷ 1 Pet. v. 8.⁸ Eph. ii. 2.

life ; of whom shall I be afraid ? ” ¹ “ I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. ” ² “ And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. ” ³ After that he shall be “ cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever. ” ⁴

Jesus is a faithful friend. Our best and most familiar friends are not always true, and often in our own house, and at our own table, we may commune with our worst foes. When he heard that Ahithophel was among the conspirators, it is no wonder that King David was in great distress. How keen must have been his sorrow when he thought that the man whom he raised to the chief place in his cabinet, and on whom he leaned so much had turned traitor ! “ As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him ; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him. ” ⁵ Nor is it strange that “ the Lord’s anointed ” ⁶ went away into the wilderness weeping, and pouring out his soul in this bitter lamentation, every letter of which seems such a tear as only a broken heart can shed. “ For it was not an enemy that reproached me ; then I could have borne it : neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me ; then I would have hid myself from him : but it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took sweet coun-

¹ Ps. xxvii. 1.

³ Rom. xvi. 20.

⁵ Amos v. 19.

² Phil. iv. 13.

⁴ Rev. xx. 10.

⁶ 1 Sam. xvi. 6.

sel together, and walked unto the house of God in company." ¹

This was also the bitterest ingredient in the cup that was put into the Saviour's hand to drink: and the very words themselves, in which He tells how He was wounded in the house of His friends, taste like wormwood: "He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me." ² In both these instances ingratitude was added to injury, and the first was worse than the last.

Those who have put confidence in men, and have been deceived and betrayed, understand this well enough. It is not so much the forsaking that hurts, as the base ingratitude that prompted the perfidious act. Only one thing is sweeter than human friendship, and only one thing is more bitter than the loss of it. I need not say that that sweetest thing is the presence of the Saviour, and that bitterest thing is His absence. So long as we retain our friends, we can laugh at disappointment, and steal something from the thieves who take our treasures all away.

But when our familiar friends prove false, and fail us in the time of need, then we begin to despair, and say at our leisure, what the Psalmist said in his haste: "All men are liars." ³ It is this that makes the reverses of fortune so hard to bear. The loss of property and power and place would all be nothing, if only we could keep the friends that these have gathered round us; but it too often happens in this selfish world that the companions of our prosperity,

¹ Ps. lv. 12-14.

² John xiii. 18.

³ Ps. cxvi. 11.

like the Priest and the Levite, pass by on the other side when we are overtaken with adversity.

“The friends who in our sunshine live,
When winter comes, are flown,
And he who has but tears to shed
Must weep those tears alone.”

And it is this loneliness in misfortune, this want of sympathy from those from whom we had a right to expect it, that crushes the spirit and hurts so hard. Like summer swallows, Job's faithless friends came twittering round him in the summer season ; but, just as soon as the winds of autumn began to blow, they all took wing together and left him alone in his overwhelming sorrow. But when the Lord turned the captivity of His servant, the craven, cowardly things came creeping back again, to “crook the supple hinges of the knee,” as formerly, that thrift might follow fawning. And the great wonder is that the good man had grace enough to receive them so kindly and entertain them with such loving hospitality.

But Jesus is a faithful friend, — faithful among the faithless, and the only faithful one. He is closer than any brother, and truer than any mother. He is a friend at all times, and in all seasons, and under all circumstances. In a sentence remarkable for the number of its negatives, He says, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”¹ When the weather is fair He is friendly, and when it is stormy weather He is more friendly. He is a friend to-day, and He will be a friend to-morrow. And we always know where

¹ Heb. xiii. 5.

to find Him: "I have set the Lord always before me: because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved."¹

Jesus is an ever-present friend. "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went;"² but he knew with whom he went, and so do we and more abundantly. We are going out with Jesus, and Jesus is going out with us to help us in our journey. "He maketh my feet like hinds' feet."³ Do you know what that sweet Scripture means? If you do not, I will tell you. A hind's feet are very small, and need but a little space to stand on. A hind's feet are very sure: wherever they strike there they stick, and seldom slip in slippery places. A hind's feet are very swift, like the wings of an eagle. And so swift, and so sure, and so small, my Jesus makes my feet, so that I can stand anywhere, and fall nowhere, and run everywhere with Himself, and like Himself, "leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills,"⁴ as "a hind let loose."⁵

When Jacob was going down into Egypt, he had many misgivings concerning the matter. It must have seemed strange to him to leave the holy land and go into a heathen land; but, when he halted at Beer-sheba, in the visions of the night he was comforted and encouraged by a voice from heaven, calling him twice by name, and saying, "Fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great

¹ Ps. xvi. 8.

■ Cant. ii. 8.

² Heb. xi. 8.

■ Gen. xlix. 21.

■ 2 Sam. xxii. 34.

nation : I will go down with thee into Egypt ; and I will also surely bring thee up again.”¹ And when those seventy souls had grown into more than a million, and were coming up out of their “house of bondage,”² the Lord remembered His promise to their father Jacob, and said to his children’s children : “My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.”³ “Yea, He reproveth kings for their sakes ; saying, Touch not mine anointed.”⁴

So, when we are directed to go from one country to another, or from one place to another ; or when Providence makes the path of duty plain, we ought not to be “disobedient unto the heavenly vision,”⁵ because the heavenly Friend is going with us. All along our weary earth way, He walks at our side, to make the rough places smooth with His precious promises, and the crooked places straight with His gracious providences, and the dark places bright with His smiling face. “Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound : they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance. In thy name shall they rejoice all the day : and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted.”⁶

Say not, then, in thine heart, “Who shall ascend into heaven ? (that is, to bring Christ down from above :) or, Who shall descend into the deep ? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.)”⁷ Behold, He is nigh thee. You can hear His voice and feel His touch.

¹ Gen. xlv. 3.

² Ex. xx. 2.

³ Ex. xxxiii. 14.

⁴ Ps. cv. 14, 15.

⁵ Acts xxvi. 19.

⁶ Ps. lxxxix. 15, 16.

⁷ Rom. x. 6, 7.

He is on thy right hand and on thy left hand. He goes before thee, and He also is "thy rere-ward."¹ He is thy sun and thy shield, and will both guide and guard thee, and give thee grace and glory. He is thy "refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."² When the north wind wakes, and winter is setting in, "He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust."³ In the day of battle, when dangers thicken, "His truth shall be thy shield and buckler."⁴ And when you are like to be overwhelmed by the vision of His glorious presence, He says, "I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by."⁵

But if we are not going out into some strange country, or entering upon some new enterprise, we are all going, up or down, into the unknown future every day; and we are often over-anxious concerning things to come, saying, What shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed? We are looking ahead as far as we can, and "fears shall be in the way,"⁶ and we are wondering how we shall ever be able to meet them, and overcome them. Now it may be that we shall never meet them at all, and if we do "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."⁷ "David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul;"⁸ but when he had served his generation he fell asleep. No, he did not die by the hand of Saul; but, after Saul died by

¹ Isa. lviii. 8.² Ps. xlvi. 1.

■ Ps. xci. 4.

⁴ Ps. xci. 4.⁵ Ex. xxxiii. 22.⁶ Eccl. xii. 5.⁷ Matt. vi. 34.

■ 1 Sam. xxvii. 1.

his own hand, David ascended his throne, and reigned in his stead "forty years;"¹ and we shall doubtless never feel some of the troubles that we fear. And those that may be in store for us shall vanish at our approach. As the three holy women were going to the Saviour's tomb, they said among themselves, "Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?"² But, when they reached the grave, the stone was rolled away. The trouble that they feared was anticipated in heaven: "for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it."³

And as we are going into the future, thinking of the hard places, let us remember that Jesus, the Lord of angels, is going with us, and His hands are strong enough to roll away the greatest stones, and to remove the greatest mountains. "Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain."⁴ And "looking unto Jesus," and leaning on Jesus, we shall be able to go through every thing that may be in store for us. He was our past help; He is our present help; and He will be our future help. "Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice."⁵

"Thou broadenest out with every year,
Each breadth of life to meet;
I scarce can think thou art the same,
Thou art so much more sweet."

His presence yesterday and to-day are pledges of His

¹ 2 Sam. v. 4.

² Mark xvi. 3.

■ Matt. xxviii. 2.

⁴ Zech. iv. 7.

■ Ps. lxiii. 7.

presence for to-morrow. "And to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant."¹

Moreover, we have these sure words of promise, which are all His own, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." ■
 "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour."³

"If our love were but more simple,
 We should take Him at His word;
 And our lives would be all sunshine
 In the sweetness of our Lord."

And, cheered by His conscious presence, our sojourn here shall become brighter, and better, and more blessed every day. "His going forth is prepared as the morning,"⁴ and He shows Himself so friendly, with every rising sun, that we are ready for any thing and every thing if only we may please Him; "for the love of Christ constraineth us."⁵ The hardest work becomes holiest worship when it is done in the name of Jesus; the heaviest burden is light when it is carried for Jesus; and the blackest sorrow grows beautiful and sublime when it is endured for Jesus. The longest road has many a pleasant turn when it

¹ Isa. lvi. 12.

² Isa. xli. 10.

³ Isa. xliii. 2.

■ Hos. vi. 3.

⁵ 2 Cor. v. 14.

is walked with Jesus, and before we are aware it will have a glorious termination. Every week is a holy week when we are living only for Jesus ; every day is the Lord's day, a holy Sabbath to Himself and an "high day,"¹ when it is spent in the service of Jesus. And, by eating and drinking always to the glory of Jesus, our common meals are all communion seasons, and so our very being becomes a song of praise without the shortest pause : "Can the children of the bride-chamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them ?"²

Like the stricken deer wounded by the archers, and panting after the water-brooks, so we may be smitten with sorrow and thirsting after happiness. Tears may be our meat day and night, without ceasing. Our souls may be cast down and disquieted within us, and all the waves and billows of anguish may be rising and rushing over our heads ; "yet the Lord will command His loving-kindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me."³ Yes, in the night, for He only "giveth songs in the night ;"⁴ and His hand shall never forget its cunning, to touch the broken harp strings of the human heart, and wake the sweetest notes of praise in the night season. When their backs were bleeding from the many stripes, and their feet were made fast in the stocks of the inner prison, "at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God : and the prisoners heard them."⁵

¹ John xix. 31.² Matt. ix. 15.³ Ps. xlii. 8.

■ Job xxxv. 10.

■ Acts xvi. 25.

It was a more dreadful night when Jesus and the twelve were gathered in the upper room to celebrate their last passover, and their first and last communion. That was a doleful night indeed, a night of "great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be."¹ The Master was exceeding sorrowful, and His disciples were sore afraid as well as sorrowful; nor is it any wonder that they were, for the Shepherd would be smitten that night and the sheep would be scattered. It was the same night in which Jesus was betrayed and arrested and denied and deserted. The hour was come, the supreme hour, which He had been anticipating so long; and He was beginning to be baptized with the baptism that He was to be baptized with. Besides, they were going from one sorrow to another, and a greater, — from the upper room to Gethsemane. But they had their song there that night, and it was a song of praise. Out of the depths, and up through the "darkness which may be felt,"² there came a joyful noise. "And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives."³

Jesus is a self-sacrificing friend. When weighed in the balance of self-denial, the best of earthly friends are found wanting. If it costs much to be friendly, the friendship soon ends; but it is under just such circumstances that our Beloved appears to the best advantage. He is so kind-hearted that He is willing to do any thing for us; and He is as able as He is willing to do all His pleasure. And His sweetest

¹ Matt. xxiv. 21.² Ex. x. 21.³ Matt. xxvi. 30.

pleasure is to look after those whom He loves ; and it is evident enough that He cannot do too much for them, and “no good thing will He withhold from them.”¹ And, when they need His mercy most, it shall be given in “good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over.”² “He shall deliver thee in six troubles : yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee.”³

He gives us His word as a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path. He gives us His Spirit to seal His love upon our hearts, and sanctify us wholly. He gives us His peace, which passeth all understanding. He gives us His grace every morning, like the manna ; and more grace ; and grace for grace ; and all grace ; and all grace abounding, — that we, “always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work,”⁴ and “adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour.”⁵ And why should He not grant us these things when He has given us Himself? The unspeakable gift not only supersedes, but it embraces and insures every other blessing : “He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”⁶ And He gave Himself for us, and all other things with Himself, when we were enemies, and now that we are friends what may we not expect? “No good thing will He withhold.”⁷

And here it would be well to pause, and mark the

¹ Ps. lxxxiv. 11.

² Luke vi. 38.

³ Job v. 19.

⁴ 2 Cor. ix. 8.

⁵ Tit. ii. 10.

⁶ Rom. viii. 32.

⁷ Ps. lxxxiv. 11.

Saviour's many sacrifices, and count up, if we can, what it cost Him to restore us to His favor. He was the friend and fellow of the Father, and heaven was His home. The morning stars and the sons of God were busy singing and shouting His praise. But He left His Father, and His Father's house, and came all the way down through the shining ranks of angels, and was made in the likeness of our "sinful flesh;"¹ and for three and thirty years He sacrificed His peace and joy and rest, and lived a life of poverty and toil and persecution. And then, at last, He died the cursed death of the cross. Yes, He sacrificed Himself, and "herein is love."²

Our best earthly friends will hardly indorse our note, when there is any peradventure that they might have to pay it. But this last thing that our earthly friends will do for us in the time of need is the very first thing that Jesus did for us without gainsaying. Of His own free will He became our surety when we had nothing to pay, and when He knew that we never would have any thing to pay. He put His hand to our protested paper when we were bankrupt, and paid our debt to the uttermost farthing with His own precious blood; "blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross."³

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."⁴ But Jesus was

¹ Rom. viii. 3.

² Col. ii. 14.

³ 1 John iv. 10.

⁴ John xv. 13.

more than man, and His love was greater. You never heard of a man dying for his enemies. What king ever came down from his throne to die for the wretch who was found guilty of treason? What judge would come down from the bench, and take the place of the criminal on whom he had just pronounced the sentence of death? Yet this is just what Jesus did for us: "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly,"¹—"the just for the unjust."²

It is only once in a great while that a man is found willing to die for another. The history of the world tells us of one notable instance, but Damon and Pythias were friends. And Paul tells us of two who for his life had "laid down their own necks,"³ but Priscilla and Aquila were the apostle's helpers in Christ Jesus, and probably they were his own children in the faith, and he lived and labored with them at Corinth, "because he was of the same craft,"⁴ and the strongest attachment sprung up between them. Paul had many other converts who loved him dearly, and often protected him in the time of danger; and if it had been possible the Galatians would have plucked out their "own eyes"⁵ and given them to him. But none were ready to be offered for him except Aquila and Priscilla: "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love

¹ Rom. v. 6.

² 1 Pet. iii. 18.

³ Rom. xvi. 4.

⁴ Acts xviii. 3.

⁵ Gal. iv. 15.

toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”¹

“Yes, man for man perchance may brave
The horrors of the yawning grave ;
And friend for friend, or son for sire,
Undaunted and unmoved expire,
From love, or piety, or pride :
But who can die as Jesus died ?”

And after having proved the sincerity of His friendship for us by the sacrifice of Himself, He is daily proving its sweetness, by bringing us into more intimate and endearing acquaintance, that we may know Him better and love Him more. After His heart had been laid out for us, it was laid open to us. “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him ; and He will show them His covenant.”² “Henceforth I call you not servants ; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth : but I have called you friends ; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.”³

Men generally select their friends from those who move in the same society and whose company would be most congenial. They invite into the sanctuary of their hearts those whose thoughts and tastes and feelings are the same as their own. But Jesus stoops down, and takes the lowest and most degraded of our race and makes them His friends. “He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill ; that He may set him with princes, even with the princes of His people.”⁴ But in doing this

¹ Rom. v. 7.

³ John xv. 15.

² Ps. xxv. 14.

⁴ Ps. cxiii. 7, 8.

He changes their nature. "Old things" pass away, and all things "become new."¹ Their filthy rags are exchanged for the Saviour's redeeming righteousness, and so the greatest sinners are transformed into the greatest saints, and introduced into the best society on earth and in heaven. Their fitness to become the friends of Jesus was not found but formed within them. By His atoning death the old law relation that existed between them is done away, and He takes them into the new love relation, and gives them all that that relation requires. "Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold."² Having called them to the "marriage supper,"³ their royal bridegroom will not forget to give them the "wedding garment."⁴

Jesus is a never-dying friend. There are some few of the human kind who are fashioned so closely after the heavenly pattern, and whose hearts are so noble and brave, that their friendship is well worth having. Neither misfortune nor affliction nor the most abject poverty can turn them aside from the object of their affections. In all turnings and tempests they remain true, as the needle to the north, and would count it their greatest joy to share the persecutions, the imprisonment, and the banishment of those whom they love. When John Bunyan was sent to Bedford jail, his noble wife went with him to divide his sorrows, if he had any sorrows, in that heaven upon earth

¹ 2 Cor. v. 17.

² Ps. lxxviii. 13.

³ Rev. xix. 9.

⁴ Matt. xxii. 11.

where he wrote the "Pilgrim's Progress." Going back to Canaan, Naomi advised and urged her two daughters-in-law to return and remain in their own land and among their own kindred, and one of them went back, but the other said, "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me." ¹

When David went into exile, his best friends went with him to keep him company, and comfort him in all his tribulations; and among these were Zadok and Abiathar, the priests who carried the ark of God, and Hushai the Archite, who desired to remain in the wilderness with their monarch, but at the king's own request they returned to Jerusalem; and when Ittai the Gittite was urged to return also, he declined, saying, "As the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be." ²

But the time came when these chief friends were separated. They went asunder at the tomb. And in a little while our friends will all be gone. One after another the grave is receiving them out of our sight, and we shall be left alone; alone, and yet not alone, because one Friend is with us, and He can never die. Jesus is this ever-present and perpetual Friend, and Jesus only. He died once, though He never would

¹ Ruth i. 16, 17.

² 2 Sam. xv. 21.

have died but for us, that He might slay the enmity between us and make us friends for ever. But He rose again from the dead, and “ever liveth to make intercession”¹ for us. As our friends are taken away, He takes their place; and when our house is left desolate the heavenly Guest comes down to abide with us, and He is better than all our flesh and blood relations. He is the sister’s best and ever-living Brother, the orphan’s best and never-changing Father, and the widow’s best and never-dying Husband. “His locks are bushy, and black as a raven,”² and He “only hath immortality.”³

“There he lies,” said an aged woman, pointing to her dear dead husband who was dressed for the funeral, “there he lies, that dear good man, and for eight and forty years he never gave me one unkind word.” I reminded her that Jesus was a kinder husband, and that He would never die. My Beloved is more than another beloved, and the Lamb’s wife will never be a widow.

“Known and unknown, human, divine !
Sweet human hand, and lips, and eye :
Dear heavenly Friend, thou canst not die,
Mine, mine, for ever, ever mine.”

But I forbear; there is neither speech nor language; and, if there were, time would be too short, and eternity would not be long enough, to tell what a friend Jehovah Jesus is. He is a personal friend, an almighty friend, a faithful friend, an ever-present friend, a self-sacrificing friend, and a never-dying friend. “This is

¹ Heb. vii 25² Cant. v. 11.³ 1 Tim. vi. 16.

my Beloved, and this is my Friend, O daughters of Jerusalem."

And, a thousand times blessed be His name, He will be just such a friend to you who know Him not. He loves you, though you do not love Him. He is waiting to receive you, though you are not willing to come to Him. For you especially His chariot was "paved with love,"¹ and nothing would please Him so much as to take you to His side to-day. It was partly for your sakes that we have caused His charming features to pass under review, that your hearts might be captivated, and that you might be constrained to seek Him with us.

"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."²

For this same cause Jesus Himself is standing at your door and knocking for admittance. "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock."³ With His hand that was pierced, and the cross to which it was nailed, He is knocking. With His Gospel that is preached unto you, and with the gravestones of your departed chil-

¹ Cant. iii. 10.

² Eph. iii. 14-19.

³ Rev. iii. 20.

dren, He is knocking. Long years ago, as soon as you were born, He began to knock, and though the door was barred and bolted against Him, and He was neglected and insulted so many times, He is knocking still. How strange that "the chiefest among ten thousand," and the only "altogether lovely" One should be left without so long, till His "head is filled with dew" and His "locks with the drops of the night"!¹ But though despised, and besought to depart, He will not depart. He cannot let you go, and He will not give you up. Hark, He is speaking too, as well as knocking. "Open to me," He says, like a poor wayfaring man, who would like to find a lodging for the night, and a refuge from the storm. "Open to me, thy best friend who died for thee." The wonder is that you are not seeking Him; but the wonder of all wonders is that He is seeking you. "Acquaint now thyself with Him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee."²

But you have set Him at naught so long, and crucified Him afresh so many times, and trodden Him under foot, and counted the blood of His covenant an unholy thing, and "done despite unto the Spirit"³ of His grace, and will there be, can there be, mercy in store for such a great and guilty sinner? Oh, yes! a thousand times yes, there is mercy for you. There is the greatest Saviour for the greatest sinner; and, if you were the soldier who pierced His broken heart, I would say that you might be sprinkled with the blood you shed, and saved and sanctified.

¹ Cant. v. 2.

² Job xxii. 21.

³ Heb. x. 29.

You have read about the Corinthians, and you remember how bad they were before their conversion ; but they were "washed."¹ Are ye not much better than they ? And you remember the "woman of Samaria"² who had six husbands, and Mary Magdalene who had "seven devils,"³ but both of them were betrothed by the Saviour. "Are ye not much better than they?"⁴ And though you were much worse there would be hope for you ; for Jesus says, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."⁵ The chiefest sinners are not beyond the wideness of His mercy, nor the reach of His almighty grace : "He is able also to save them to the uttermost."⁶ "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord : though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow ; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."⁷ "Did He say scarlet sins ?" exclaimed a dying girl, whose wicked ways were bringing her down with sorrow to the grave. "Did He say scarlet sins ?" "Yes, child," answered the minister, "He said scarlet sins : though your sins be as scarlet." He then read to her a few verses from the eighth chapter of the Gospel by John ; and, kneeling on his knees, he commended her to the Saviour who came to seek and to save that which was lost. As she was failing fast, the good man called to see her again the next day, and as he drew near to her bedside a pleasant smile came upon her pale face, as she whispered these sweet words, with a tongue that could scarcely do its

¹ 1 Cor. vi. 11.² John iv. 7.

■ Mark xvi. 9.

⁴ Matt. vi. 26.⁵ John vi. 37.

■ Heb. vii. 25.

⁷ Isa. i. 18.

office, "My Jesus has washed my scarlet sins away." And "accepted in the Beloved,"¹ and "leaning upon her Beloved,"² she soon went up from the wilderness, to join that great multitude "which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."³

And now, beloved out of Christ, if you will "suffer the word of exhortation,"⁴ I would entreat you to give your heart to Jesus "while it is called to-day."⁵ By all that is beautiful in heaven, and by all that is dreadful in hell; by "the blood of the Lamb,"⁶ and by "the wrath of the Lamb,"⁷ — I beseech you at once to "kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little."⁸ Then you shall shorten the shining road to heaven, and set the flying miles to music, as you sweetly sing: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels." ■

And when you reach the marriage mansion, your voice, accustomed to the tune, shall unite with all the ransomed throng, in singing this new song of love "unto Him that loved us."

"Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to Him:

¹ Eph. i. 6.

² Cant. viii. 5.

³ Rev. vii. 14.

⁴ Heb. xiii. 22.

⁵ Heb. iii. 13.

⁶ Rev. vii. 14.

⁷ Rev. vi. 16.

⁸ Ps. ii. 12.

■ Isa. lxi. 10.

for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready." ¹

"And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And He said unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb." ²

"Dearly beloved and longed for," ³ remember that the love of Jesus is personal and particular. He is not speaking to many as many, but to each and every one apart from all the rest. "The Master is come, and calleth for thee." And, as we must bid you farewell, He takes you by the hand, saying so lovingly, "I will betroth thee unto me for ever." He says more than this. He condescends to reason with you if, by any means, He may persuade you to accept of Him as your heavenly Bridegroom. "Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." ⁴ "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty: for He is thy Lord; and worship thou Him." ⁵

"And now if ye will deal kindly and truly with my Master, tell me: and if not, tell me; that I may turn to the right hand, or to the left." ⁶

¹ Rev. xix. 6.

² Rev. xix. 8.

³ Phil. iv. 1.

⁴ Isa. lv. 3.

⁵ Ps. xlv. 10, 11.

⁶ Gen. xxiv. 49.

By Blessed avouch, may I ever be "looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame and is sit down at the right hand of the Father."

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